



INTRODUCTION

SHRADDHA KUMBHOJKAR

The post-globalisation understanding of History in India is facing serious challenges from identity politics, monopolization of History and intolerance towards alternative understandings. The papers in this collection were presented in a seminar that was organised as an attempt towards recognizing the validity and significance of reassessing Histories. Nineteenth Century in the Indian history is characterised by sweeping changes in almost all walks of life. Though the geographical process of colonisation had completed in the early decades of the century, the colonisation of the minds and bodies of the colonials went on for years to come.

Maharashtra in the nineteenth century exhibits all the characteristics of a society standing at the crossroads of civilization. Western education, press, industrialisation and material changes in production and consumption patterns resulted in fundamental changes in the thinking of the people. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of the Postal Service in 1837, rise and spread of the native press and rudimentary education, chiefly with missionary initiative. The second half witnessed more dramatic events that changed the destiny of the subcontinent forever. Western education was pioneered with the establishment of Universities. This was – not accidentally – immediately preceded by the revolt of 1857. As education and communication improved – Railways began their Indian journey in 1853 – ideas were exchanged faster than ever before. The society began to look at itself with a changed perspective that was strongly influenced by the interaction between the colonial present and the distant past. People devised various strategies to manifest their opposition to the colonial present – ranging from critiques of social stratification that was perceived to have invited the colonial rule, to violent revolts that were instigated by local leaders. On this background, ways of thinking underwent fundamental changes in the nineteenth century Maharashtra.

The papers in this collection were presented at the seminar entitled “19th Century Maharashtra : A Reassessment” organised by the Department of History at the Tilak Maharashtra University, Pune in association with

the Indian Council of Historical Research. They touch upon various aspects of Maharashtra in the nineteenth century and try to take a fresh look at the things that happened over a century ago. The first four papers review various aspects of the intellectual life of nineteenth century Maharashtra. These are followed by five specific case studies that relate to the Maharashtrian society.

The first paper in this collection by Shripad Bhat argues that the traditional processes of creation of knowledge in the Sanskrit language was still alive in the nineteenth century Maharashtra. He points out that while literary contributions to the Sanskrit language abounded in this period, traditional schools of Philosophy were not seriously touched.

The second paper by Raja Dixit provides the missing link as to why traditional ways of expression were not popular in the realm of philosophy. He has provided a review of the Historical writings in this period. He has also argued that a War of Positions was being fought in the philosophical and intellectual realm. The war implied threefold tension in the society – Colonial-native, Hindu-Muslim and High Caste-Low Caste. This led to the evolution of a counter-historiography that can be embodied in writings of Mahatma Phule.

Another trajectory that appears out of these tensions in the society is described at length in the next paper by Dileep Chavan. He argues that the threat posed to the Status Quo or the existing hegemony of the upper castes due to the changes introduced in the nineteenth century Maharashtra resulted in the various attempts of Standardisation of the Marathi Language in this period. By increasing the elitist Sanskrit component in the standardised Marathi language, it was aimed to become incomprehensible for the masses. Once again, it must be noted, that it was Mahatma Phule who challenged the straight-jacketed notion that elite culture was synonymous with the Indian culture.

The next paper by Narayan Bhosale discusses the dialectics of women's reforms in this period. He reviews the elitist and other attempts to bring about a change in the lives of women. He argues that these attempts initially were elitist and involved deliberations rather than actual empowerment of women. While the reforms cannot be seen as a linear progression, the attempts by Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj and its followers led the way.

The elitist nature of early women's reforms is the topic of the next paper by Jaswandi Wamburkar. She has taken a case study of Deval's Play "Sharada" which coincided with and contributed to the legislation banning child marriage that was introduced a century after a ban on the Sati. She has argued that the elite play had the "guilty readers" as the desired

audience. It had to restrict the message of social reform to a level acceptable to its audience. Therefore, it could never reach the level of radicality as displayed by the followers of Phule.

Aravind Ganachari in his study of the Case of Erloo Bin Narayan throws further light on why radical reforms could be demanded only by the people from the lowest social strata. He has unearthed fresh evidence from the archives that shows that the colonial claims of benevolence were in reality quite hollow – a fact asserted by Phule as early as 1882. Colonial rulers boasted of principles of ‘justice and equity’ but their recipe was not for India, and their “utilitarian and political interests” over-ruled all humanitarian considerations. The paper shows that the Revolt of 1857 was not a defining moment for British administrative policy as such discriminatory policies existed even before an assurance of non-interference in social matters was given by the Queen’s Proclamation [1858].

Discriminatory policies are the colonial legacy that permeated the socio-cultural field as well. Aju Aravind’s paper discusses how Amar Chitrakatha- the most popular comic-books of twentieth century India- provide narratives of the lives of Ambedkar and Savarkar that are ideologically charged. With Nehruvian socialism and the developmental state as a hidden counterpoint to the narratives these comic books reduce real people to abstractions. This serves the rightwing project of depicting a seamless coexistence between rationality and credulity, secularism and spiritualism; accepting a monolithic understanding of the Indian society and wiping out the contribution of the subalterns.

All these papers point to the fact that Mahatma Phule’s contribution to the making of modern Maharashtra is seminal. The next two papers touch upon the various aspects of the life and times of Mahatma Phule. Merin Simiraj discusses the contribution of Phule in giving voice to those that were historiographically silenced. Shraddha Kumbhojkar argues that Phule’s works can be seen as an alternative route towards attainment of a subaltern Utopia.

It may be said in conclusion that the book takes a fresh look at the various aspects of nineteenth century Maharashtra. It includes the critiques and reviews of literature, language, history writing and women’s reforms in this period. It argues that the elite attempts at social reform had their own inherent limitations. They could not reach the level of radicality reached by the subalterns whose lived experience of discrimination was the biggest stimulus for reform. Mahatma Phule stands out from among a range of thinkers in this period for his innovative understanding of the Indian reality. He widened the horizons of identity of suffering by

encompassing various classes of oppressed people in it; such as women, Shudras, slaves, African Americans, etc. Thus, Phule was one of the rare thinkers who reconciled the Indian reality with its Universal counterpart.

CONTRIBUTION OF MAHARASHTRA TO THE FIELD OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE IN THE 19TH CENTURY¹

SHRIPAD BHAT

The 19th century marks an important stage in the history of Sanskrit Studies in India. Sanskrit language opened up a new era in the study of a history of the world. The contribution of Sanskrit Scholars in the 19th century has been of two kinds, viz. 1) along traditional lines and 2) along modern lines, involving critical edition of texts, comparative, cultural and historical studies. The latter kind has, of course, been more prominent even in Maharashtra.

Mention may be made here to show the contribution of the 19th century that the first and foremost among the modern Sanskrit Scholars was Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837- 1925). One of his basic contributions to Sanskrit learning was the composition of two graded textbooks on Sanskrit grammar in English. They were commonly used in secondary schools through out India and soon made a deep impact on the Sanskrit studies in this country.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856- 1920), the scholar patriot of India, well known for his 'The Arctic Home in the Vedas', 'The Orion', 'The Vedic Chronology' and the commentary on the Bhagavadgita. Shankar Balakrishna Dixit (1853- 1898) wrote a history of Indian Astronomy in Marathi language, which took into account all available Vedic evidence on the subject. Kashinath Vaman alias Bhau Shastri Lele of Wai (1863 -1918) was a Sanskrit Pandit of the traditional type and was particularly well versed in Vedic ritual and Dharma-àstra. He edited for some years a journal called Dharma in which he published Vedic and Dharma-àstra texts together with Marathi translations. Laxman Shastri Chandratreya

¹ I am thankful to Late Prof. R. N. Dandekar who edited book, Sanskrit and Maharashtra a collection of various articles written by well-known scholars, from which many references have been taken to compose this article.

(1852 - 1920) translated Vājasaneyā Saūhitā into Marathi, and five adhyāyas of that translation have been published under the title Vedapuṇa.

V.K. Rajwade (1860- 1944) is known for his words in Ēgveda as also his edition, with translation and notes, of Yāska's Nirukta. Pt. S. D. Satvalekar (1866- 1944) is made valuable contribution to Vedic studies by publishing neatly printed editions of all the Vedic Saūhitās. His Marathi and Hindi translations of many Vedic texts and also his many writings bearing on Vedic culture popularized Vedic studies in Maharashtra and other parts of the country.

C. G. Bhanu has translated several principle Upaniṣads and other philosophical texts into Marathi by C. G. Bhanu (1856- 1930), Vishnu Shastri Bapat (1871- 1932) and Sadashiv Shastri Bhide (1878- 1939), among others.

As far as the grammar is concerned, there were many works to be mentioned, Nilkantha Shastri Thatte (1750-1834) was acclaimed as one of the greatest grammarians in the Deccan. He trained a long line of worthy pupils, who on their part, made significant contributions to the study of grammar either through teaching and or by means of their writings, Sadashivabhata Ghule, wrote the Vivṛti on ōabdendu÷ekhara and the Bhaṇi on the Paribhāṇendu÷ekhara. A mention may be made here of Bhaushastri Ghule (1828-1925) of Nagpur who was the author of ōekharavivṛtisaṅgraha (a contemporary on the ōabdendu÷ekhara) and the Gajāsātravṛtti (a commentary on the Pāṇini Sātra 1.3.67).

One Veikāṇamādhava, who had migrated to Madras and was serving there as lecturer in Marathi in Fort St. George College about 1827 wrote a small work called Maharashtra prayoga candrikā. This is a grammar of Marathi in 227 Sanskrit sātras of Pāṇinian type and is accompanied by a short Sanskrit vṛtti, a Marathi vṛtti and illustrations. Raghavendracharya Gajendragadkar (1792- 1852) of Satara one of the pupils of Nilakantha Shastri Thatte, who wrote Tripathagā on the Paribhāṇendu÷ekhara, the Viṇami on the ōabdendu÷ekhara, and the Prabhā on the Vaiyākaraṇa bhuṇaṇasāra. About the middle of the 19th century, Vishnu Shastri Bhat of Poona, wrote the Ciccandrikā on the Paribhāṇendu÷ekhara.

There was a great tradition of teacher and disciples. Bhaskar Shastri Abhyankar of Satara pupil of Thatte who was himself a great teacher and whose deciples also attained eminenceas great teachers of grammar. Kashinath Shastri Astaputre (1800- 1850) of Wai, one of his pupils, namely Rajaram Shastri Karlekar (1810 -1875), was the teacher of the great Balashastri Ranade. These three, Astaputre, Karlekar and Ranade, formed the backbone of teaching staff of the Government. Sanskrit College of Banaras, which during 1850-1910, had come to be recognized

as the stronghold of Vyākaraṇa and Dharmaśāstra. Among these Balashastri Ranade, in his short life (1839- 1882) attained an outstanding mastery in the Veda, Ritual, Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta and Dharmaśāstra. He was honored by Pandits of Varanasi with well-deserved title 'Bālasarasvatī'.

During this period, scholars of Dharmaśāstra, contributed a little part. Western scholar Colebrook [c. 1800 A. D] prepared the digest Dharmaśāstrasaṅgraha. Among some minor works belonging to about this period may be mentioned the *Āraddhamāñjarī* (1810), the *Prāyaścittamāñjarī* (1814) and the *Kṛtyamāñjarī* (1818) (all the three) by Bapubhatta Kelkar of Phanasi (Dist.- Ratnagiri), the *Acārabhūṭa* (1819) by Tryambakram Oka and the *Ācārendu* (1838) by Tryambak Narayan Mate.

In the 19th century traditional scholars have made some significant noteworthy additions to the ancient Indian philosophical systems. Thus, Narahara Shastri Marelkar, later *ṣaīkarācārya* of Karaveerapeetha, wrote the commentary *Bālabodhinī* on the *Pārvamāmāṃsā sūtras*. Krishna Shastri Ghule (1873- 1953) of Nagpur wrote *Hautradhvāntadivākara* a critical work on *Māmāṃsā* and *ṣrauta*. The Tanjore Kannaōiga, author *Vācchevara* (18th – 19th century) who received patronage at Poona and from Patwardhan Sardars of the southern Marāṭha states, is known his commentary *Cintāmaṇi* on *Khaṇḍadeva-s Bhāṇḍādāpikā*. He also wrote on Dharma and *ṣrauta*. Swami Kevalananda Saraswati (earlier known as Narayan Shastri Marathe) (1877-1957) compiled the valuable *Māmāṃsākośa* in seven volumes, and these were published by Prajna Pathashala, Wai (1952- 1966).

The literature on Vedānta, particularly the Advaita Vedānta produced by Maharashtrians is quite profuse. Raghunath Shastri Porvate (died 1820), who enjoyed the patronage of Nana Saheb, the minister at Bhor, wrote a commentary on the Gita, called the *Padabhāṭa* as also the Advaitic polemic against Dvaita, called *ṣaīkarapādabhāṭa* in 1848 A. D. Acyutaraya Modak (1778-1833) of Panchavati, near Nasik was a prolific writer who is credited with the authorship of as many as thirty works dealing with such varied subjects as poetics, religion and Advaita philosophy. He was also a noted Sanskrit Poet. Kṛṣṇananda Saraswati, pupil of *saccidananda*, was the author of *Advaitasāmrājya* (1891), the *Gītāśārōddhāra* (1892) and the *Kaivalyagāthā* (1903) on Vedānta and *Vijñānabhakti* according to 18th chapter of *Bhagavadgita*. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1908-14) wrote a Sanskrit Commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* during his jail in Mandalaya. Vasudevananda Saraswati Tembeswami (1854-1913) wrote the *Sikṣātraya* with a *svopajñā* commentary. The work deals

with the basic tenets of Indian philosophical thought. He also wrote the *sātravṛtti* on the *ṣaīkarabhāṣya*, on the *Brahmasūtras* and several other books, like the *Gurusaūhitā* and the *dviśāhasrā*, which seek to correlate the tenets of Advaita philosophy with the Dattatreya cult.

The *Bhagavadgita* is perhaps the most seminal of all Hindu scriptures. There is, therefore no wonder that it should have attracted the attention of a large number of Maharashtrian thinkers and commentators. In the 19th century, *Citsadānandalaharā*, a commentary on the *Gita* written by Raghunath Swami, (1891) which is actually a *pravacana* on the *Jāne÷varā* with a story affixed at the end of each *adhyāya*, the *Bhāṣāvivṛtīnīkā* (in prose) by Raghunath Shastri Parvate, and the *Setubandhināṅkā* by Vishnuboa Brahmācari (1825 - 1871).

In his essays on the *Bhagavadgita* (1875, 1882), K.T. Telang has discussed, such problems as the 'Gita and the Vedas', 'the *Cāturvarōya*' and 'Buddhism and the Gita' and has concluded that the *Gita* reflects a period of revolution in the concept of *Dharma*. The most outstanding Marathi exposition of the *Bhagavadgita* is the famous *Gītārahasya* (1915) by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856- 1920). According to Tilak, *niūkāmākarmayoga* is the central doctrine of the *Bhagavadgita*. Tilak, further, shows how the *Gita* has provided a metaphysical basis for its ethical teaching.

An account of the contribution of Maharashtra to Sanskrit poetics during the 19th century would remain incomplete if one failed to mention Acyutaraya Modak who wrote *Sāhityasāra* with a *svopajña* commentary *Sarasāmōda*, in 1831 A.D. This work consists of 12 chapters, called *ratnas*, and is worthily described as a convenient and well-written compendium on poetics. A reference also be made, in this context to excellent editions of works on Sanskrit poetics, viz, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Vishwanath by P.V. Kane and the editions of *Mammaṇa's Kāvyaaprakāṣa* by Chandorkar (Parts 1-3, 1896, 1898).

As regards the music is concerned, some kind of realistic attitude can be observed in a work called *ṣrāmāllakūyasaūgātām* written by V.N. Bhatkhande (1886- 1936). Bhatkhande tried to explain the practice of music, which he called *lakūya*. It is noteworthy to mention that his work reveals a keen historical sense on the part of the author. He sought to compare and contrast the various characteristics of the same *rāga* as mentioned by different authorities and thereby to ascertain the oldest form of that *rāga*.

The study and practice of *Ayurveda* underwent a reorientation in the 19th century. The art of printing was introduced. Indigenous plants began to be studied botanically. Attempts began to be made to collect

manuscripts of Ayurvedic texts. Thus Krishnashastry Bhatvadekar of Bombay published, in 1860- 64, the *øata÷lokā* with the commentary *øata÷lokācandrakalā* and a Marathi translation, the *Vaidyāmçta* and the *Kāñmudgara* with a new commentary. The *nighaõñuratnākara*, compiled by Godbole (Bombay 1867) contained the description and analysis of new plants and other substances. *Vegetable Materia Medica of Western India* was compiled by Dymok (Bombay 1883). The search for manuscripts in the then Bombay Presidency, made by R.G. Bhandarkar in 1882-84, brought to light a number of Ayurvedic works. Bhandarkar also published (Part I, Bombay, 1893) the lists of Sanskrit Manuscripts in private libraries in the Bombay presidency.

Awna Moreshwar Kunte (1844- 1896) of Bombay edited the *Caraka saūhitā* and translated a part of the *Su÷ruta saūhitā* in 1876. He also edited, in 1880. *Vāgbhañā's Aũñāigahçdaya* with Arunadatta's commentary. Among other works, edited about the same time, may be mentioned *Vāgbhañā's Aũñāigasaũgraha* by Ganesh Shastri Tarate (Bombay, 1888) and *Vāgbhañā's Aũñāigahçdaya* with a Marathi translation and a valuable introduction by G. K. Garde (Poona, 1891). The *Yogacintāmaõivaidyakasāra saũgraha* by Harũakārti sārā was published in Bombay (1869). Hanumanta shastri Padhye of Poona edited 1894 the *Vçdamādhava* with *ørākaõñhadatta's* commentary, while T.G. Kale edited two texts on *Rasa÷āstra* with Marathi translation. There were also published editions of the *÷arīgadhara saūhitā* (Bombay 1891) by Prabhuram Jivanram and the *Hārāta saūhitā* with Gujarati translation (Bombay 1892) by Jairam Raghunath. The *nighaõñu÷eua* by Hemacandra, which deals with medicinal plants, was edited by K. P. Parab and others in 1889 (Bombay).

In the literature of mathematics and Astronomy a mention may be made of Govinda Balakrishna Dixit (1783- 1854) was a poet and a writer on *Jyotiua* and *Dharma÷āstra*. His *kālāprabodhodaya* and *Ekada÷āka÷a* are well known. Dinakara, son of Ananta of Poona, is known to have written the *Grahavi÷asāraõi*, the *māsaprave÷asāraõi*, the *Grahaõñ kajāla* etc. A reference may also be made here to the Sanskrit-Marathi work, *muhārtasindhu* which was written by Gangadhar Shastri Datar (1822-1855) of Poona. A special mention needs to be made of Venkatesh Bapuji ketkar (1854-1930) wrote authoritative Sanskrit works on astronomy, such as, the *Jyotirganitam*, the *ketakāgrahagaõitam* and the *Vaijyantipa÷cāigagaõitam*.

Thus, in the 19th century Maharashtrians made definite contribution in various branches of Sanskrit literature. It is, however, found that the philosophical schools like *mimansā*, schools of *Vedānta*, other than

Advaita, Nyàyavaisesika, and epics like Ràmàyana and Mahàbhàrata were not seriously touched in the 19th century. But also studies were underwent of these schools which can be observed through the contribution made by Maharashtra Sanskrit scholars in the 20th century.

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HISTORICAL WRITINGS: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE¹

RAJA DIXIT

Any historiographical review will be incomplete without taking into account the sociological and ideological context. This article, therefore, aims at perceiving the nineteenth century Marathi historiography as a dialectical development.

The tradition of serious historical research and its presentation in the form of a historical narrative was almost absent in India until the middle of the 19th century. Though Indians used the term *Itihas* since the ancient times and occasionally showed an awareness of history in an informal manner, unlike the western people, they did not develop the art and craft of history writing. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* (12th Cent. A D.) stands out as an exceptional piece of historical writing. Some bards and story-tellers in medieval Maharashtra dealt with historical themes and produced literature such as ballads (*Povadas*), romantic poems (*Lavanis*), chronologies/genealogies (*Shakavalis*), chronicles (*Bakhars*), family accounts (*Kaifiyats*) and biographical sketches of saint-poets (*Santa-Charitre*). Though this was 'history' narrated by them in their own way, it generally lacked in the discipline and rigour of historical research. Barring a few exceptions like the *Sabhasad Bakhar* (1694-97 A. D.) they were put aside as 'historically useless material' by most of the modern historians of India. It must however be admitted that this literature has immense historical value not because of its factual accuracy, but because of its ability to show some socio-psychological traces of the past. Though this literature cannot be termed as historical writing in a modern sense, it definitely made the Marathi people history-conscious, which is a prerequisite of the production and reception of 'written history.' This medieval historical consciousness, coupled with the modern idea of history,

¹ This article is based on the following article by the same author: Raja Dixit, 'Historical Writings And Research', in Rajendra Banhatti and G.N. Jogalekar (ed.), *A History of Modern Marathi Literature, Vol. II, (1800 to 2000)*, Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, Pune, 2004, pp. 238-78.

introduced by the Westerners in the 19th century, prepared a fertile ground for the rise and growth of historical writings in modern Maharashtra.

The British, who became the rulers of India, showed great interest in Indian history and culture. But this was not a purely academic pursuit. Their efforts at acquiring a 'command of' Indian languages, literature, law, history and culture, to borrow the phraseology of Bernard Cohn, were mainly for creating the language, literature, law, history and culture 'of command.' The oriental studies of the 18th and 19th centuries were an occidental construction of the 'orient' as they perceived it and as they wanted the oriental people to perceive it. This process, as described by Edward Said as the 'orientalization of the orient', was the part of a comprehensive imperialist project of the Western rulers. Macaulay, who was instrumental in introducing English education in India, made his oft-quoted statement on the 2nd Feb. 1835 that "We [the British] must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." In the light of this conscious policy of Anglicisation, history obviously became an instrument of British hegemony in India. No wonder that a generation of British administrators came forward to study Indian history and to shape it in the new mould so as to suit British colonial needs. Mark Wilks' *Historical Sketches of South India* (3 Vol.s, 1810-14), James Mill's *The History of British India* (6 Vol.s, 1818), James Cunningham Grant Duff's *A History of the Mahrattas* (3 Vol.s, 1826), John Malcolm's *The Political History of India from 1784 to 1823* (2 Vol.s, 1826), Captain James Todd's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829), Mountstuart Elphinstone's *The History of India* (2 Vol.s, 1841), Sir William Hunter's *History of British India* (1899-1900), Vincent Smith's *Early History of India* (1904), W. H. Moreland's *India at the Death of Akbar* (1920) are some prominent works produced by British 'administrator-historians'. Though there was an imperialistic design behind the whole gamut of history-writing by the British, it cannot be denied that the Indians, in various ways, benefited by this exercise. History as a serious modern academic discipline and history writing as a research-based methodological exercise were introduced in India through these writings. Indian people's knowledge of history as a branch of knowledge was certainly broadened and their mental horizon vastly widened because of these writings and the new education to which they were introduced. Indians started reading, studying and assimilating this 'given' history and being influenced and affected by it. In course of time, they realised the dangers and drawbacks of this history and while launching their struggle for counter-hegemony and fighting their 'war of

position' they also used history as a powerful cultural weapon. The history of modern Indian and Marathi historical writings cannot be understood properly if we miss this dialectical dimension.

The first modern biographical work in Marathi was published in 1816, and this form of literature began to flourish by the middle of the 19th century. Most of these biographies were translations, adaptations or imitations of biographies from other languages. However, they contributed to the new historical awareness in Maharashtra. History became an important component of the new curriculum when the British rulers introduced New Education. The growing interest in academic pursuits and new awareness regarding the pedagogical value of history were the motivating forces for history writing. Historical works of the Western historians, especially of those associated directly or indirectly with the British administration in India, were read by the early generations of the English-educated natives. The works of James Mill, Grant Duff, Elphinstone, Murray and others were read in schools and colleges in Maharashtra. Many abridged editions, adaptations and translations of these works were produced so as to make their comprehension easier for the native students. Most early historical writings in Maharashtra were government sponsored textbook writings and were cautiously presented so as to avoid any governmental disfavour.

The first historical work in Marathi entitled *Raghuji Bhosale Yanchi Vamshavali* (Genealogy of Raghuji Bhosale) was published in Bengal at Serampore in 1816. It traced the story of Bhosale clan right from Babaji and gave an account of some activities of Shivaji too. One of the pioneering Marathi books on history was *Bakhar Marathyanchi* (1829-30), a translated version Grant Duff's 'A History of the Mahrattas.' Captain David Capon and Baba Sane were its translators. The book was prescribed as *vaachana-book* (reading text) for school children. Kushaba Limaye prepared its abridged edition in catechistic form. This book, named *Maharashtra Deshache Varnan* (1840), became popular and nine editions were published till 1866. Baba Padmanji's *Shalankarita Maharashtra Deshacha Sankshipta Itihas* (1866), a text-book published by the Christian Vernacular Translation Society, was a rapid survey of the history of Maharashtra from ancient times to the establishment of British rule. The pioneering work on Indian history was a book based on Elphinstone's 'The History of British India.' It was an abridged and translated version prepared by Balshastri Jambhekar (1846) that was later modified by Major T. Candy (1849). A two volume comprehensive translation of Elphinstone's book was done by Vishwanath Narayan Mandalika (1861). Many such translations and adaptations were published due to the

encouragement and help provided by the Department of Public Instruction. The British Government, while giving such patronage, obviously curtailed the freedom of the native authors and translators. M. G. Ranade's remark on the translation-works was: "Of the fourteen which relate to India, the translations of Elphinstone's and Murray's histories, and of Grant Duff's Maratha history, are the only ones which possess any literary merit" (1867). Many dynastic histories, histories of other Indian provinces, of England and some other foreign countries, and also of the world, were produced during this phase. All these works represented the initial enthusiasm and awareness of the newly educated intellectuals whose histories were mainly didactic narratives lacking in originality and interpretation.

Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) was a pioneer of Epigraphical writings in Maharashtra, who contributed fourteen articles on ancient Indian inscriptions to the journal (1841-1847) of the Bombay branch of Royal Asiatic Society. History was sometimes narrated through books that were not formal histories and also through journalistic essays. Right from its infancy, the Marathi Press showed a deep concern for historical themes. The very first issue (May 1840) of Balshastri Jambhekar's magazine *Digdurshun* contained an article entitled *Itihas*, which discussed Shivaji's administrative system. The *Digdurshun* also introduced its readers to the history of Greece. Bhau Mahajan, in his weekly *Prabhakar*, published a series of articles on *Great Britain Deshachi Rajaneeti* (March-April 1842), which traced the development of democracy in England. Through another series *Frenchanche Bandacha Vruttanta* he gave an account of the French Revolution of 1789 in more than twenty-five articles (1842). He also gave a brief account of the history of America (1847). All these articles on non-Indian history were published with a view to making Marathi readers conscious about democracy and nationalism. The first treatise on Economics in Marathi was *Hindustanchi Pracheen Va Sampratchi Sthiti Va Pudhen Kaya Tyacha Parinam Honar Hyavishayin Vichar* (1843). Its author Ramakrishna Vishwanath wrote also on ancient and medieval Indian history, but this cannot be termed as methodical and specialized history-writing. Its importance lies not in the authenticity of the content, but in the new and nationalistic awareness of history. It was another early economic thinker and social reformer, *Lokahitawadi* Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-1892), whose contribution to history writing was more concrete. His sense of history was amply reflected in his socio-economic and journalistic writings (e.g. *Shatapatre*, 1848-1850) during the middle of the 19th century. He also wrote genealogical essays in *Induprakash* (1862) on medieval Indian Princes and Generals, and historical essays on various

religious communities. He regarded the neglect of history as one of the fundamental drawbacks of the Indian society. He firmly believed that a consciousness of history, which unfolds a story of change, was an important pre-requisite of social reform. Lokahitawadi made a critique of the past for shaping a better future. He wrote a number of books on history during 1870s and 1880s. He compiled volumes of a number of historical stories and useful information about the past. He wrote a monograph on the third battle of Panipat and also on the Kshatriya Kings of Delhi. His histories of India, Gujarat, Saurashtra, Rajasthan and Shrilanka stand as a testimony that Lokahitawadi was never parochial in his approach. He gave expression to his broad nationalistic and reformist sentiments through his historical writings.

The early period of historical writings in Marathi (1816-1867) is rightly termed as the 'Age of Grant Duff' by *Mahamahopadhyay* Datto Waman Potdar. This phase produced, in the words of M. G. Ranade, 'not a single original historical work of merit.' This was a period of imitation and education. But a new generation of Marathi historians started coming out of the spell of British administrator-historians. A landmark in this respect was the presentation of an essay by Nilakantha Janardan Kirtane (1844-1896) at the Poona Young Men's Association in 1867. Kirtane, a junior student of the Deccan College, in his essay entitled *Grant Duffkrut Marathyanchya Bakharivaril Tika*, made a critique of Duff's history. Pointing out Duff's mistakes and showing his limitations, Kirtane stressed the need for a fresh look at Maratha history. This essay, published in *Induprakash* and later printed in the form of a booklet (1884; new edn. 1926), was an emotional counter-attack on colonial historiography. A more profound, conscious and nationalistic attack was launched in 1874 by one of the admirers of Kirtane's thesis. Vishnushastri Chiploonkar (1850-1882) serialised his long and trend-setting essay *Itihas* (History) through his *Nibandhamala*. He explained the meaning of the term History, analysed the age-old neglect of history in India, described the contribution of ancient Greeks and Romans to historiography and listed the advantages of a study of history. He strongly criticized the 'biased foreign historians and frustrated missionaries for presenting the history of India in a selfish, mischievous, unjust and childish manner.' Mill, Macaulay and Morris were the principal targets of his attack. Chiploonkar also condemned those natives who blindly accepted such history as 'Mahaprasad' (pious blessing). He reminded the readers of the glorious historical tradition of India by citing numerous examples. He made a fervent appeal to the natives to stop the neglect of history, give up their indifference and take up the responsibility of collecting and preserving the source-material of their

history for the reconstruction of the past. His mention of the cyclical theory symbolised his optimism regarding the 'dispellment of the fog of untruth and illusion and the rise of the Sun of truth and knowledge.' Kirtane and Chiploonker, through their inspiring essays, opened new channels of historical research and gave rise to the 'great wave of affinity for history' which later found a special mention in Rajwade's introduction to his first volume of *Marathyanchya Itihasachi Sadhane* (1898).

A New Age had thus begun. Marathi intellectuals concentrated their energies on creating a nationalistic counter-culture of which history was a vital component. The last quarter of the 19th century proved to be a period of great awakening. It witnessed the sharpening of the contradiction between the interests of British rulers and their Indian subjects. The other contradictions within the Indian society also began to crop up. This was a period of tensions, complexities and identity crisis. It is no wonder that history, under such circumstances, got a new prominence in Maharashtra.

The pre-Nibandhamala period witnessed the publication of sixty-one books on historical themes in Marathi, whereas one hundred and ten historical works were published between 1874 and 1900. The quantitative growth was also marked by a qualitative improvement in the form of research-orientation. In 1876, the *Bharatavarshcheeya Pracheen Aitihasika Charitra Va Sthalakosha* (an encyclopaedia of ancient Indian historical persons and places) compiled by Raghunath Bhaskar Godbole was published. This unique compilation was a result of seven years of constant hard work. In 1878 Chiploonkar, along with Kashinath Narayan Sane and Janardan Balaji Modak, set up a magazine dedicated to the exploration and publication of old literary and historical material. It was named as *Kavyetihas-Sangraha* (Collection of ancient poetry and history). The magazine had three sections devoted to Sanskrit poetry, Marathi poetry and Maratha history respectively. This journal, during its eleven years of existence (1878-1889), brought to light about twenty-five Bakhars and five hundred and one original documents comprising approximately 6,300 pages. The task of meticulously editing this huge volume of material was completed mainly by K. N. Sane (1851-1927), who also added explanatory notes throwing light on subtle historical aspects. Sane proved to be one of the great pioneers in the field of historical research in Maharashtra. Prominent among the historical works edited by him were *Bhausahebacha Bakhar*, *Panipatchi Bakhar*, *Peshwyanchi Bakhar*, *Malhar Ramraokrut Charitre*, *Holkaranchi Kaifiyat* and *Dabhade Va Gaikwad Yanchi Hakikat*. In 1896, Sane delivered a series of lectures on the 'sources of Maratha history' at Hiraibagh, Pune. These lectures were published in the form of six articles in *Kesari*. This was a clear manifestation of a growing public

interest in historical research.

Two prominent scholars contemporary to Sane were Balaji Prabhakar Modak (1847-1906) and Rajaramshastri Bhagwat (1851-1908). Modak wrote a series of books (1876-1887) on the history of Kolhapur and Karnataka. He also wrote the history of Muslim States of the Deccan. Modak's works were based on a careful study of numerous original documents. Bhagwat was versatile scholar and a forthright reformist. His most famous work was *Marathyanchya Sambandhane Char Udgar* (1887). He applied linguistic methods for analysing the past with special reference to the rise of the Varna and caste systems in Maharashtra. He wrote a small biography of Shivaji in 1889 and depicted Shivaji through a liberal progressive nationalist perception. In his essay on *Maharashtra-Dharma* (1895) he emphasised that the Bhagwat Dharma preached in Bhagwadgeeta was the real basis of Maharashtra-Dharma. His egalitarian philosophy was reflected in his historical writings. By 1890s dedicated scholars such as Narayan Bhagwan Pavgi, Vasudeoshastri Khare, Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade, Govind Sakharan Sardesai, Dattatray Balwant Parasnis and Shankar Shrikrushna Deo were engaged in serious historical research, faithfully following the Rankeian dictum "No document, no history." Two of the nineteenth century historical journals set up by D.B. Parasnis - *Maharashtra-Kokil* (1887-1892) and *Bharata-Varsha* (1896-1900) - published a number of *Bakhars*, *Kaifiyats*, *Yadis* and documents. In 1897, Vasudeoshastri Khare set up a journal *Aitihāsik Lekhsangraha* for the same purpose. *Satkaryottejak Sabha* set up by Shankar Shrikrushna Deo at Dhule in 1893 was a pioneering effort in the institutionalization of historical research and writing activities.

Sayajirao Gaikwad, the ruler of the Princely State of Baroda, gave a generous patronage to the publication of historical writings. Two series of books entitled *Rashtra Kathamala* and *Maharashtra Granthamala* were published during 1890s under his patronage. In 1895, Bal Gangadhar Tilak launched the *Shivajayanti Utsav* (an annual festival to celebrate Shivaji's birth anniversary), which proved to be an effective instrument of mass-mobilization for the nationalist cause. A number of literary artists had also become historically conscious which led to the sudden growth of historical plays, novels and poems. Keshavsut, the pioneer of modern Marathi poetry, made an earnest appeal through his poem *Nairutyekadeel Vara* (Wind from the south-west, 1898) to read neglected historical documents lying in old Maratha forts. This appeal symbolised the spirit of the age. A tide of historical consciousness had burst forth. Its climax came at the end of the nineteenth century with the publication of three great works that laid the real foundations of modern scientific history writing in Maharashtra. In

1898, *Musalmani Riyasat*, the first volume of G.S. Sardesai's *Riyasat*-series and first volume of V. K. Rajwade's 22-volume series *Marathyanchya Itihasachi Sadhane* were published. This was followed by the publication of *Rise of the Maratha Power*, the magnum opus of Justice Ranade in 1900. It is also an interesting co-incidence that the real foundations of the history of Marathi literature were laid in 1898 by the pioneering works of Justice M. G. Ranade (an English *Note on the Growth of Marathi Literature*; later translated into Marathi by S. G. Malshe in 1982), L. R. Pangarkar, G. J. Agashe, Moti Bulasa and V. L. Bhawe. All the above-mentioned works marked the beginning of a new age of indigenous historiography.

Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842-1901) was a prominent figure and the moving spirit behind a number of socio-cultural movements in Maharashtra including history-writing. He had the unique distinction of writing as well as making history. A man with a synthetic mind and broad vision, Justice Ranade represented the blend of Western liberalism and Indian humanism. He provided a scientific and theoretical base to 'written history' in Marathi. His approach was not narrative and biographical, but basically interpretative and sociological. His aim was to present a clear view of history from the Indian standpoint. Though he did not write a single book on history in Marathi, his name became immortal in Marathi historiography. His *Rise of the Maratha Power* (1900) set new standards and became a source of ideas and inspiration for future generations of Marathi historians. Though written in English, different scholars later translated it into Marathi separately. N.R. Phatak's translation (1964) is perhaps the best among them. Though Ranade's *Rise* is often consulted by history-lovers, all his writings are truly 'historical' as suggested by N. R. Phatak. Seen from this angle, Ranade's *Dharmapar Vyakhyane* (Religious Discourses, published posthumously in 1902) becomes very relevant historiographically. Though Ranade wrote about many individuals such as Shivaji, Tukaram, Ramdas, Martin Luther and others, he perceived them as individuals representing contemporary socio-historical trends and value-structures. While analysing the achievements of these individuals he tried to comprehend the historical processes and intellectual discourses with which they were associated. Dispelling the misconceptions created by Duff's history, Ranade showed that the rise of the Marathas exemplified "the first beginnings of what one may well call the process of nation-making." Avoiding deification of Shivaji, Ranade discovered the social evolution in Maharashtra that culminated in the political phenomenon called *Shivaji's Swarajya*. It was Ranade, who put the history of Shivaji in the wider socio-cultural context and tried to convey the moral import of

Maratha history. Though Rajwade did not agree with Ranade's views emphasising the social relevance of the medieval Bhakti movement, he praised Ranade for his theoretical foundation and for providing social causation of continuity and change in Maharashtra.

Iithasacharya Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1863-1926) and *Riyasatkar* Govind Sakharam Sardesai (1865-1959) began their illustrious careers as historians in the closing stage of the nineteenth century. Rajwade combined empirical research with sweeping philosophical vision. In him, we find a paradoxical attachment to objectivity and interpretation. He was truly a giant who represented the spirit of his age that was full of paradoxes, complexities and internal turmoil. Sardesai was a hard-working dedicated scholar. Many critics ridiculed and underestimated him as a 'mere compiler', forgetting the fact that interpretations and articulation of theories become possible only on the solid foundation of systematic compilation of innumerable facts laboriously woven into a logical and chronological narration. Beginning with his first volume of *Riyasat* series in 1898, Sardesai provided such a foundation through his narration of political history of India from thirteenth to mid-nineteenth century.

Ranade in his 'note' on Marathi literature (1898) significantly remarked, "No mere foreign graftings can ever thrive and flourish, unless the tender plant on which the grafting is to be made first germinates and sends its roots deep in its own indigenous soil....Unless the minds of our young men are disabused of the prejudice they imbibe in early life that the historical sense is wholly absent in India, and until they are trained to appreciate the value of these contemporary narratives and records at their true worth, it is hopeless to expect any real and permanent growth of the true historical and critical spirit which alone can ensure success in the future cultivation of this department of our literature." It was the 19th century spirit of Renaissance in Maharashtra, which fostered a new way of looking at the past. As explained by Arvind Deshpande, the history produced during the late nineteenth (and the early twentieth) century was a 'construct' derived from the triple conflict : (a) British hegemony and imperialist viewpoint of history versus Indian national identity, (b) Newly emerging Muslim identity versus Hindu revivalist identity and (c) new challenge of non-Brahman identity / movement versus traditional Brahmanic identity.

The intellectuals in Maharashtra, aware of British attempts at a cultural hegemony, launched a 'war of position' to create a counter-hegemony. Though elitist in nature, this movement played a significant role in the history of modern Maharashtra. The writing of modern scientific history was the part of a broad process of modernization of India within the

framework of Indian Culture. Writing history was one of the ways of making history. History was used as an instrument of hegemony by the British imperialists. The Maharashtrian elite used history, on the one hand, as a nationalist weapon to fight against the British, and on the other hand, as an instrument of creating and legitimizing their hegemony within the indigenous society. A counter-historiography, therefore, was bound to arise and create an inner upward pressure. In this context, the role played by *Mahatma* Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890) was very significant. He was not a historian in the strict sense of the term. But his thought-provoking and egalitarian writings had a specific historical perspective that gave birth to the subaltern streams in Marathi historiography. His severe indictment of the Aryan-Brahmanic tradition, his emphasis on focusing ideas and achievements of Buddha, Charvaka, Kabir, Tukaram and Shivaji and his counter-mythisization glorifying the pro-people *Baliraja* tradition effectively demonstrate his historical approach. Phule was basically a polemicist and his role was not that of an academic historian exploring unknown sources and insisting on narrating and interpreting authentic facts. His was the role of an organic intellectual aiming at the creation of a counter-culture. The alternative trends that developed mainly in the twentieth century were inspired by Phule's views and tried to turn the 'top-down' Marathi historiography in the upward direction, at least to some extent.

STANDARDISATION OF MARATHI UNDER COLONIALISM: STRATEGIES OF CASTE-CLASS HEGEMONY¹

DILEEP CHAVAN

The medium through which the mass of the population must be instructed I humbly conceive must be their *Vernacular Tongues*, and neither English nor Sanskrit....In a word, knowledge must be drawn from...the English language, the Vernaculars must be employed as the media of communicating it, and Sanskrit must be largely used to improve the Vernaculars and make them suitable for the purpose.²

Standardisation of language is relatively a modern phenomenon. Capitalism has an inherent tendency to homogenise and standardise various processes, cultural as well as material. Calling standard language a 'normalized' product, Pierre Bourdieu considers standardisation of language a modern phenomenon, which has emerged along with modern industry.³

Standardisation of language has been looked at from both the instrumental and the sociolinguistic perspectives. The instrumentalist perspective valorises the process of standardisation. It sees standardisation 'as a tool and defines it in terms of efficiency, rationality and commonality.' The term language standardisation designates the process of change in status, function, and form by which a dialect becomes 'standard'. The sociolinguistic perspective delegitimises the notion of

¹ I am thankful to Dr Simon Bernabas, Dr Wandana Sonalkar and Dr Umesh Bagade for commenting on the earlier draft of this paper.

² Report of the Board of Education for the Years 1847 and 1848, No. VII. Bombay: American Mission Press, 1850, 180. (emphasis in original)

³ Like the different crafts and trades which, before the advent of a large-scale industry, constituted, in Marx's phrase, so many separate 'enclosures', local variants of the *langue d'oeuil* differed from one parish to another until the eighteenth century. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language as Symbolic Power*. (1992). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, 46.

standard and considers standardisation a deliberate and conscious attempt of a certain group.

James Milroy and Lesley Milroy have distinguished between two kinds of mechanism that tend to encourage stability in the use of a language or dialect. Both may apply at any level of society but one or other may be dominant at some levels. The first mechanism is *covert* and *informal* pressure for language maintenance, which is exerted by members of one's peer-group or social group. The second is *overt* and *institutional* enforcement of norms through public channels such as the educational and broadcasting systems.⁴

Recent scholarship on the issue of language standardisation is more critical about the socio-cultural repercussions that result from standardisation. Milroy and Milroy define standardisation as the suppression of optional variability in language, observing that the various stages that are usually involved in the development of standard language may be described as the consequence of a need for uniformity that is felt by influential portions of society at a given time.⁵

Though general linguists, usually, do not hold the superiority claim of a certain language valid, there is a strong tendency among these linguists to base their grammar on the language used by the elites. All early grammarians of English had resorted to Latin to provide them with a model.⁶ The early grammarians of Marathi disregarded the linguistic variability prevailing in Marathi and considered the language used in Pune as the model for constructing their grammar. A. K. Priyolkar acknowledges that the language used by the Chitpavan brahmins during the *Peshwa* regime was drastically different from the language used in the rest of Maharashtra.

Sociolinguists tend to believe that the use of standard language is region-specific. There is a serious flaw in the identification of a standard dialect with the speech used in a particular region as such an assumption presupposes a homogeneous society existing in a given region. Arjun Parakrama argues that such an assumption is misleading since this dialect is determined more by education and class than by locality *per se*.⁷

The argument that standardisation becomes necessary in order to achieve wider circulation of ideology is widely recognised. Standardisation

⁴ Milroy James and Lesley Milroy. *Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, 56.

⁵ Milroy and Milroy quoted in Hogg et al 273.

⁶ Hogg, Richard and David Denison. *A History of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2006, 284.

⁷ Parakrama 8.

is motivated by various socio-political-cultural needs of the dominant class in a given society. Speech is difficult to be standardised as it is tremendously variable. Absolute standardisation of spoken English is never achieved. As compared to speech, writing is standardised more easily. While arguing about the impossibility of complete standardization, Milroy and Milroy have said that the only fully standardised language is a dead language. They deem it appropriate to speak more abstractly of standardisation as an ideology, and a standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality – ‘a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent’.⁸

Though it is nearly impossible to standardise language in general and spoken language in particular, the modern state is untiringly involved in propagating a certain version of language as the standard language. This is achieved through education, media, state machinery, etc.

Milroy and Milroy refuse to accept that the influence of the mass media in recent times has had a powerful effect in reducing the diversity of English and bringing about uniformity. This is not a proven fact; it is merely a belief:

In favour of this view, it can be reasonably argued that remote rural dialects have been dying out quite rapidly. Against it, we can point out that although the Received Pronunciation of Standard English has been heard constantly on radio and television over 60 years, only 3 to 5 % of the population of Britain actually speak RP.⁹

In linguistic matters, the nineteenth century in Maharashtra was largely, but not wholly, a century of authoritarianism and prescription. During this century, much of the necessary work of codifying Standard Marathi was carried out through a flurry of grammar books, dictionaries, prose writing, literary journals and textbooks. The tone of most of this work was prescriptive, setting out how language ought to be used, not necessarily how it actually was used by the common people.

The Beginning of Modern Marathi Grammar

It is generally agreed that Indian grammarians have had one goal above all others, which was to preserve down to the minutest detail, the ancient Sanskrit language. Patanjali has also discussed the purpose of studying Sanskrit grammar. He points out that there are five reasons for studying Sanskrit grammar - preservation of the Vedas, linguistic recontextualization

⁸ Milroy et al 22-23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, P. 29.

of Vedic ritual formulas, religious commitment based on scriptural injunctions, economy of effort in attaining mastery of the language and removal of interpretational doubts. Language was one of the significant variables, which indicated and further reinforced the social status in ancient India. Madhav Deshpande points out that the Aryans generally looked at the mass of non-Aryans as substandard human beings, godless non-sacrificers, worshippers of dummy gods and phallic gods, and those whose language was obscure and unintelligible. In his grammar, Panini made a distinction between *bhasha*, the colloquial language and *chhandas*, 'the language of the Vedic texts'. Panini's *Ashtadhyayee* is an attempt to describe the Aryan language. For Panini, according to Madhav Deshpande,

...*bhasha* stands for 'language'; in fact it actually refers to the upper-class language, in relation to which other forms of Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan languages were viewed as being substandard, as those peoples themselves were placed lower in the social hierarchy.¹⁰

The need of describing systematically the grammar of Marathi in the early nineteenth century was first felt not by the indigenous elites but by the colonial rulers. The English-educated indigenous elites in the early nineteenth century were relatively unmindful of the emergence of modern Marathi which was in the making. However, the colonial state could not afford the non-standard vernaculars, as these vernaculars were to become the vehicle for the dissemination of the colonial ideology. Therefore, the initiative in this direction was formally taken by the British by offering patronage to such attempts. William Carrey, who was a missionary, wrote the first grammar of Marathi. The subsequent grammars of Marathi received heavy patronage from the colonial state. The growing importance of the grammar of Marathi in the wake of increasing demand for English was clearly stated in the second report of the Bombay Native School Book and School Society.

William Carey wrote the first grammar of Marathi. He was assisted in this venture by a brahmin named Pandit Vajinath Sharma.¹¹ One of the early

¹⁰ Deshpande, Madhav M. *Sanskrit and Prakrit: Sociolinguistic Issues*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Private Limited, 1993, 2.

¹¹ William Brown, who published a *Grammar of the Gentoo Language*, was assisted by Mamidi Venkaiah and Goondamulla Purushotnam. Pandit Rama Sastry, Head Sanskrit and Telugu Master at the Fort St George College assisted another grammarian of Telugu named A. D. Campbell, who had published the first version of Telugu grammar. Sudhir, P. 'Colonialism and the Vocabularies of Dominance'. In Tejaswini Niranjana (ed.) *Interrogating Modernity* Calcutta:

treatises on the grammar of Marathi was written by Venkat Madhav in the early nineteenth century in Madras under the patronage of the British. Unsurprisingly, this text was written in Sanskrit. As has already been argued, Marathi was not recognised as a medium for serious academic writing by the pundits of Marathi. Many grammars of the Dravidian languages like Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam were constructed in Sanskrit in the pre-colonial period.¹² While constructing the grammars of Telugu, the grammarians in the service of the East India Company named A. D. Campbell (*A Grammar of Telugoo Language*, 1816), William Carey (*A Grammar of Telinga Language*, 1820), William Brown (*A Grammar of Gintoo Language*, 1817) and C. P. Brown (*A Grammar of Telugu Language*, 1840) targeted the language of the educated upper-caste native functionaries in administrative services. There was another reason for this to happen. There was no grammar of Marathi written in Marathi on which Venkat Madhav could model his grammar. Moreover, there was hardly anyone who could understand Marathi in the Madras Presidency.

There was no tradition of writing grammar in Marathi before the colonial contact except a few rudimentary attempts made by the Mahanubhavi scholars. The early grammarians of Marathi explicitly stated the purpose of their endeavour. Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar (1814-82) wrote that grammar was required to teach people to speak and write pure Marathi and teach them how to distinguish between pure and impure uses of language. Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-46) also defined grammar as a science of speaking and writing in a pure way.¹³ Gangadhar Shastri Phadake wrote that his grammar would help the learner to enter the world of Sanskrit.¹⁴ Since one of the aims of grammar was achieving facilitation of Sanskrit learning, it was obvious that their grammar was partly based on Sanskrit. On the contrary, Dadoba's grammar had a different purpose. Unlike Phadake's grammar, Dadoba's grammar was partly aimed at facilitating the learning of a foreign language, particularly English.¹⁵

Another motivation for the writing of early grammar, as has been mentioned earlier, was the assumption that the grammatical knowledge of the vernacular would facilitate the learning of English. Dadoba made this clear in the introduction to his grammar:

Seagull Books, 1993, 339; Thomas Trautmann. *Aryans and British India*. New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2004, 151.

¹² Arjunwadkar, K. S. *Venkatmadhvakrit Maharashtraprayogchandrika*. Pune: Deshmukh and Company. 1970, 6-7.

¹³ Jambhekar, Bal Shastri, *Outline of Grammar*, Mumbai, 1860 1-2.

¹⁴ Kulkarni, K. B. *Marathi Gadyachi Utkranti*. Mumbai: K. B. Kulkarni, 1956, 86.

¹⁵ Dadoba quoted in Kulkarni 87

For the last two to three years, there has been increasing liking for grammar among the [native] boys....This [the knowledge of the grammar of Marathi] helps in learning a foreign language.....¹⁶

Construction of the grammar of a language is always seen as an essential prerequisite for its standardisation. Another use of grammar, as pointed out by Dadoba, was born of the necessity of standardisation. Dadoba stated very explicitly that one of the great advantages of constructing the grammar of a language is to achieve standardisation. The idea that all the users of language should use one standard language for speech and script for writing gave impetus to the early attempts of construction of the grammar of Marathi. Also, achieving proficiency in the vernaculars of India was made obligatory to the British civil servants in India.¹⁷

Bernard Cohn has argued that the formation of colonial knowledge was a collaborative project as the elites in colonial India also contributed to it. While commenting on the purpose of this project, Cohn writes:

...the production of these texts and others which follow them began the establishment of discursive formations, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse (Orientation) and had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into Europeans objects. The subjects of these texts were first and foremost the Indian languages themselves, re-presented in European terms as grammars, dictionaries and teaching aids in a project to make the acquisition of a working knowledge of the languages available to those British who were to be part of the ruling groups in India.¹⁸

Halhed's English Grammar of Bengal (1778), according to Cohn, was 'part of a large project that would stabilize and perpetuate British rule in Bengal.'

The East India Company had established a college at Hayleybury to train civil servants selected for postings in India. Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779–1859), himself proficient in Marathi, had devised regulations regarding examinations in vernacular languages which were stringently enforced on British officials and civil servants in India. Many vacancies

¹⁶ Priyolkar, A. K. (ed.) *Maharashtra Bhasheche Vyakarana*. Mumbai: Marathi Sanshodhan Mandal, 1954 5-6.

¹⁷ For more information, refer to the chapter entitled 'European Lokanchi Marathi Bhashechi Pariksha' in Pinge Madhusudan Srinivas. *Yuropiyanancha Marathicha Abhyas va Seva*. Mumbai : Marathi Sanshodhan Mandal, 1960, 110-18.

¹⁸ Cohn, Bernard S. 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command' in Ranjit Guha (Ed.) *Subaltern Studies Vol. – IV*. Delhi: Oxford U P 1985, 283.

could be filled only by those who acquired knowledge of one of the native languages, and who had shown these qualifications by examinations before committees appointed for this purpose.¹⁹ Such a policy required a book on grammar, which would be specially designed for the learners in this college.

James Ballentyne fulfilled this need by writing a grammar of Marathi. In the preface to the book, Ballentyne explains the purpose of and sources used for writing the grammar:

This sketch of the Mahratta Grammar has been drawn out for the use of the East India College at Haylebury, where a Mahratta class has been recently formed....In forming these outlines, use has been made....of a collection of manuscript notes by a native Brahmin.²⁰

Ballentyne, we should note, had to seek the help of a brahmin. The Rev. J. Stevenson published *The Principles of Murathee Grammar* in 1833. At the time when he published this grammar, a very few books were published in Marathi. Though Stevenson was a very good scholar of Marathi, he had to consult two brahmins named Purshoo Ram Punt Godbole and Dajee Shastree Shookla. He also invited four brahmins from various regions and employed them to teach him more about Marathi grammar.²¹ While writing his grammar, he had to borrow terminology from Sanskrit grammar.²²

We find a complex interplay of functions in the making of each grammar. This entire exercise was carried out under the powerful influence of Sanskrit, English and the kind of Marathi used by the upper-caste elites. Caste-specific and region-specific varieties of Marathi did not have any place in this process.

Marathi Grammar and Prescriptivism

The teaching of grammar was integral to colonial design. Robert Philipson, who has unearthed many documents of the US and British

¹⁹ Allen, David O. 'State and Prospects of the English Language in India' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 4, (1854), 267.

²⁰ James R. Ballentyne. *A Grammar of Mahratta Language* Edinburgh: J. Hall, 1839.

²¹ Kulkarni, K. B. 'Marathi Vyakaranachi Kulkatha' in Damle Moro Keshav Shastriya *Marathi Vyakarana* (1910). Pune: Yande Raghunath Damodhar, 1965, 95.

²² Arjunwadkar K. S. *Marathi Vyakaranacha Itihas*. Mumbai: Mumbai Vishwavidyalaya and Pune: Dyanmudra, 1992, 35.

English language agencies, has noted that the teaching of grammar in the colonial period, which had been presented as an impartial academic concern, was in fact driven by policies favoured by the British government. The teaching of grammar was clearly a concern of colonialism. A knowledge of the grammar of the English language was according to the colonial office in 1847, considered to be ‘the most important agent of, civilization for the coloured people of the colonies’.²³ This shows that the teaching of grammar was not an ideologically neutral or a humanising enterprise aimed at the welfare of the learners; on the contrary, it was motivated by a desire to construct a more docile subject. The teaching of grammar and thereby the teaching of rules, was aimed at creating a domesticated and malleable labour force.

It is well known that prescriptivism has remained a dominant ideology in linguistics. However, in the ‘mainstream’ linguistics of recent times scholars have generally claimed that prescriptivism is not a central part of their discipline and even that it is irrelevant to linguistics.²⁴

However, such a widespread recognition of the importance of descriptivism has led the linguists to assume that the ‘prescriptive phenomena’ play no part in language. Many professional language scholars feel that whereas it is respectable to write formal grammars, it is not quite respectable to study prescription.²⁵

However, in the brahminical linguistic tradition of ancient India, the ideology of prescriptivism was upheld. The grammarians were advised to take note of the changed standard usage, and revise the grammar accordingly. Such revisions were either made in terms of reinterpretations of Panini’s rules or in terms of an explicit agenda. Patanjali advises a grammarian not to be a *praptijnya*, “one who knows what the rules of grammar will generate,” but to be an *istijnya* “one who knows the actual desired standard usage of the elites.”²⁶

R. B. Gunjkar (1843-1901), editor of the first literary journal in Marathi called *Vividhadnyanavistar*, criticised Bal Shastri for being prescriptivist. However, finally, Gunjkar himself took the prescriptivist stance covertly. In another article entitled *Maharashtra Bhashemadhye Vyakaran ani Kosh Yanchi Aavashyakata*, Gunjkar made out a strong case for prescriptivism. Laying emphasis on the language used by the

²³ Holborow 74.

²⁴ Milroy et al 5.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 6.

²⁶ Deshpande 29.

intelligentsia, he argued that the grammarians should not invent their rules and pass value-judgements.²⁷

Dadoba Pandurang subscribed to prescriptivism in an overt manner. He was quite aware of the regional and other variants of language and disqualified certain versions of Marathi as impure:

[The *Kohandeshi* and *Gomantaki* versions of Marathi] are different from the pure Maharashtri language. Apart from these versions, there are two chief types of Marathi *Deshastha* and *Kokanstha*; in this grammar, I used the language used by the political elites and scholars in the central part of Maharashtra - Pune. As my father and I were born in Konkan Konkani words may have exceeded and I apologise, if they exceed at all.²⁸

Dadoba and Major Candy had serious disagreement over the use of *myan* (I) and *tyan* (you). Dadoba preferred the usage in Pune. He wrote: 'But, in Pune, which is the centre of the linguistic region, no different forms of the pronouns *mi*, *tu* are used. This is why I used *mi* and *tu* in my grammar.'

R. B. Gunjekar also criticised Bal Gangadhar Shastri for defining grammar in terms of the purity of language. Bal Shastri had defined grammar as the "science of speaking and writing pure language." He had further argued that grammar was to teach the learners how to distinguish between the pure and the impure use of language. He stamped such a view as descriptive. But Gunjekar argued that the grammarian has no right to recommend a certain language use as pure. However, Gunjekar's claim on descriptivism withered away as he took the prescriptivist stance by suggesting that the grammarians should base their grammar on the language used by the respectable community in the society.

Dadoba had made it very clear that grammar is a science by which language is standardised. In the preface to the second edition of his grammar, Dadoba complained that the structure of Marathi had become very loose, as no grammarian had ever 'combed' it to systematize it. Finally, Dadoba's normative emphasis on certain uses of language did not bear fruit as the users of Marathi had devised their own ways of using the language.

In his autobiography, Dadoba complained that even forty five years after the publication of his grammar, nobody had ever attempted to use

²⁷ Gunjekar, R. B. Ramchandra Bhikaji Gunjekar Yanche Sankalit Lekh Vol.II. Mumbai: R. K. Tatnis, 1942, 10-11.

²⁸ Tarkhadkar, Dadoba Pandurang. *Maharashtra Bhasheche Vyakarana*. (1836) Mumbai: American Marathi Press, 1850, no peg.

Marathi according to the rules he had prescribed. In the second half of the nineteenth century the grammarians of Marathi had begun to admit that linguistic diversity is inevitable in every society. For example, Krishnashastry Chiplunkar (1824-78) acknowledged that though language was a generic or unified term, it was never so in a given society.²⁹ He conceded that Marathi was not used in the entire region uniformly and, even the language used in the same city is not free of variation. He accepted that there was a gap between the language used by the illiterate kunbis, shimpis (tailors) sutars (carpenters), etc. and the brahmins.

Chiplunkar drew attention to the utility of learning of grammar of one's own mother tongue. While doing this, Chiplunkar made distinction between the layman who does not require the knowledge of grammar and the one who wishes to become a writer for whom the knowledge of grammar becomes indispensable. For Chiplunkar, the grammar of one's own language becomes the essential criterion which distinguishes the illiterate populace from the literate intellectuals. Chiplunkar took it for granted that those who did not learn grammar did not face any difficulty as the day-to-day discourse did not require any knowledge of or proficiency in grammar as such.³⁰

Chiplunkar complained that the grammarians of no language based their grammar on all the versions of language. The grammars are based on the language spoken and, particularly, written by the people who are educated, powerful and respected in the society.³¹ He also agreed to the view that no language is inherently greater than the other language. A certain language does not become greater than the other because of its virtue; it receives greatness because of the social status of its users.

However, in spite of the prescriptive stance taken by the grammarians, Chiplunkar's object of study, while writing his essays on Marathi grammar, was the version of the Marathi used by the brahmins in Pune. Chiplunkar also stressed that the language on which grammar is to be modelled should be usages in the old Marathi grammar. The study of grammar should benefit its learners in understanding the old books in Marathi. Such a self-contradictory stance taken by Chiplunkar on Marathi grammar proves that his position on Marathi language in general and Marathi grammar in particular was not drastically different from that of the prescriptivists.

²⁹ Joshi R. B. (ed.). Chiplunkar Krishnashastry. *Marathi Vyakaranawaril Nibandh*. (1893) Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1971, P. 23.

³⁰ Ibid., P. 3.

³¹ Ibid, P. 25.

Dadoba and the Influence of Sanskrit

The vernaculars in India had to suffer severely at the hands of the traditional elites as they preferred adherence to Sanskrit over undertaking cultivation of the vernaculars. Bhalchandra Nemade attributes this to the brahminical tradition which had despised Marathi. Bal Shastri Jambhekar frankly acknowledged this: "This is absolutely necessary in the present state of the feelings of Natives on this subject, who in their veneration of the classical Sanskrit, treat the Marathe Grammar as too trivial and puerile."³² Dadoba himself complained in 1836 that many people in this country and, particularly, those who were born in the high families and learned in the Puranas did not make any efforts to learn Marathi.³³

Dadoba's grammar remained a widely used school grammar of Marathi from 1836 to 1911. However, Dadoba was criticised by the classicists for many reasons. Though there was enough evidence to argue that it was his own grammar, he was seriously charged with plagiarism. Dadoba took a long time to refute these charges, i.e. until the publication of the seventh edition of his grammar. One charge was that he might have seen the unpublished papers of the late Bal Shastri Jambhekar. Perhaps, it was assumed that Dadoba could not compose grammar as he was not trained in Sanskrit.

Paradoxically, when the nineteenth century grammarians of Marathi started constructing the grammar of Marathi, they could not escape the influence of Sanskrit. Many grammarians have openly acknowledged that Marathi grammar exhibits the influence of Sanskrit. For example, the grammarians of the American Marathi Mission also assumed: The Marathi, though undoubtedly an original language, has received large accessions from other languages. Specially has it been affected by the Sanskrit. Some of its most important grammatical principles and idioms are evidently from Sanskrit origin.³⁴

Dadoba, though not so proficient in Sanskrit language, could not escape the influence of Sanskrit on his grammar. The editor of the *Dnyanakosha* called Dadoba's grammar a 'vague analysis' and attributed his failure to his being ignorant of Sanskrit.³⁵ Being a non-brahmin, Dadoba perhaps could not have access to Sanskrit. His teacher Bapu

³² Jambhekar G. G. (ed.) *Memoirs and Writings of Acharya Bal Shastri Jambhekar* (1812-1846). Vol. II.

³³ Priyolkar 1954 5.

³⁴ *Grammar of the Marathi Language*. Bombay: American Marathi Mission, 1854, iv.

³⁵ Arjunwadkar 1992 81.

Shastri Maydeo Shukla used to tell his non-brahmin students: “You, Prabhus and Goldsmiths, will never master the pronunciation of Sanskrit words. You, fish-eaters!”³⁶

Dadoba wrote his grammar while he was in his early twenties and working as Assistant Teacher in the Elphinstone Institution. His was the first grammar which was written by one who had no acquaintance with Sanskrit. This is why Dadoba's grammar was very little influenced by Sanskrit. However, Dadoba did not take it as a virtue but as a serious shortcoming that he intended to correct.

Thereafter, Dadoba made a conscious effort to learn Sanskrit grammar.³⁷ However, Major Candy condemned Dadoba's use of Sanskritised language. In his review of Dadoba's grammar, he said:

The style though occasionally obscure is in general clear and good. The terms of Maratha grammar are necessarily borrowed from Sanskrit and must therefore be difficult to the unlearned reader; but the explanation of terms should always be given in plain and simple Murathee. The author has not sufficiently attended to this point. He has here and there used high Sanskrit words and compounds without necessity.³⁸

One of the reasons that led Dadoba to learn Sanskrit so consciously was that he was from the non-brahmin background and he knew well that he could not have settled issues in grammar without achieving proficiency in Sanskrit. Dadoba, who had no training in Sanskrit, could have written a grammar of Marathi which was uninfluenced by Sanskrit. However, Dadoba turned out to be a traditionalist rather than a radical. In the absence of a strong alternative to the brahminical ideological tradition, Dadoba had to succumb to the brahminical ideology.

It has already been argued that despite the fact that Dadoba was ignorant of Sanskrit, his language could not evade the influence of Sanskrit. Dadoba had to invite the wrath of Major Candy for doing so:

Another great fault of Dadoba's style in this grammar is his unnecessary use of high Sanskrit words I do not here refer mere to technical terms of grammar, which when they do not exist in Murathee must be borrowed from Sanscrit, but to his explanations, which ought to be as simple as can be. It is very creditable to Dadoba that he has made himself acquainted with many Sanscrit terms and phrases that are not commonly known by his

³⁶ Arjunwadkar, K. S. *Marathi Vyakaranacha Itihas*. Mumbai: Mumbai University and Pune : Dnyanmudra, 1991, 44.

³⁷ Kulkarni 1956 96.

³⁸ Maharashtra State Archives, General Department, Vol. - 540, 1840, 136.

countrymen, but he should be cautious in his use of them. Sometimes he shows that he does not himself understand the words he uses. I have pointed out one or two instances of this in my remarks. I fear that his books, as it now is, will be above the comprehension of 19/20 of the masters of Vernacular Schools. To their scholars of course it will be still more difficult.³⁹

Though Dadoba made the first serious attempt to write Marathi grammar, he could not contribute much to historical grammar. Arjunwadkar argues that it was Krishnashastri Chiplunkar who laid the Foundation of the historical method of grammar. R. B. Joshi, who edited Chiplunkar's essays on Marathi grammar, passed a comment on the two contemporary grammarians of Marathi - Dadoba and Krishnashastri Godbole. Joshi compared Dadoba with Godbole with respect to their contribution to the historical method of enquiry in grammar. He attributed the shortcomings of Dadoba's grammar to the latter's inability to write the historical grammar of Marathi.⁴⁰ Godbole was admired for showing that Marathi was essentially an offspring of Sanskrit.

Dadoba Pandurang complained in his book on Marathi grammar that many people in this country were unaware of the term grammar and those who were born of 'great parentage' and teachers strongly tended to ignore it. However, Dadoba himself ignored the pre-colonial attempts of the construction of the grammar of Marathi. Though these attempts remained stray and rudimentary, they are important because these grammars were based neither on Sanskrit nor on English.

The ideas of language in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century were elitist. Olivia Smith has shown that theorisation of language was systematised rigorously when the elitist notions of language began to be challenged by the democratic movements. In this period, the concepts encoded in theories of language, dictionaries and grammars were brought energetically to the fore when non-classically educated writers attempted to gain a place in 'civilization.'⁴¹

Standardisation of Marathi also began when the hegemony of the upper castes had begun to be challenged in the mid-nineteenth century in Western India. Jotirao Phule (1827-90), who spearheaded the attack on the Brahmanical order, had succeeded in locating discursive space in the colonial situation for the liberation of the lower castes from the bondage of caste, which is termed as 'internal colonialism'. As the literate sphere was

³⁹ Kulkarni 1956 35.

⁴⁰ Joshi 3.

⁴¹ Smith, Olivia. *The Politics of Language*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1984, vii.

becoming increasingly democratised during his phase, newer and larger sections of the society were likely to come in the purview of education. As this was a potential threat to the hegemonic position of the upper castes, standardisation was used as tool to make Marathi more Sanskrit-oriented and thus incomprehensible to the lower caste learners.

DIALECTICS OF WOMEN REFORMS IN 19TH CENTURY MAHARASHTRA

NARAYAN BHOSALE¹

The 19th Century is a period of momentous transformation in the history of Maharashtra. A perusal of these transformations is an academically enriching enterprises, which has been undertaken by several academicians. The interaction between the ideas of the “orient” and “occident” in the 19th century spurred the processes of changes in Indian society & directed it towards a different horizon.

19th century social and religious reformers were convinced that the key to a comprehensive transformation of human existence in this part of the world was radical social transformation. Consequentially movements seeking reforms in society rapidly proliferated in the context of a rigorous critique of institutionalised religion. Social reform movements prioritised the “women’s” question, wherein a lot of thinking was directed towards the amelioration of the condition of women who were seen to be severely shackled, inhibited and hindered. All of this can be termed as “Enlightenment”. This enlightenment seems to have evolved out of the “competitive and realistic harmony” that prevailed in the 19th century between the Western and Indian traditions. An insight shaped by the enlightenment critiqued “tradition” and set it right on the newly evolving horizon. In this case the evolution led to modernity.

Scholars have often visualised the process of Indian enlightenment to have been a wider, nationwide processe. This generalisation often loses sight of the fact that the monolith of “Indian enlightenment” has been fashioned out of several such process that were primarily regional. Enlightenment thinking moulded the discourse of women’s reforms in Maharashtra. Yet the section of elite classes and non elite masses comprehended the enlightenment in the light of their ideologies and worlds of experience. Hence, elite social reformers made efforts to resolve the women’s question as pertaining solely to their women (i.e. elite, upper

¹ Independent Researcher, Pune.

caste women). The “traditionalist” & “reformist” among the elites interpreted the enlightenment by using classical, native and western epistemologies. The traditionalists refused to accept the need to reform native languages, cultures & religions. Adopting a critical attitude, the reformists linked the deterioration of Indian society to issues related to the enslaving of the women and the outcastes, albeit, in a limited sense.

Reformers, by their words and deeds initiated a frontal and vocal assault on several aspects of the inhuman tradition and its related rituals. The women’s question of the 19th century encompassed such complex and seemingly difficult issues as marriage of the girl child, marriage between girl child and older males, enforced consummation of a marriage with girl child, restrictions on women’s education, polygamy, tonsuring of a widow, sati, restrictions on widow marriages etc. These issues continued during British rule and seemed to be an inheritance from the earlier era of the rule of the Peshwas. The enlightenment provided an insight into the nature of these issues and thereby facilitated the eradication of these social maladies. The enlightenment attitude initially seems to have impacted only the elite classes in society. In the hierarchical world of the Indian caste system, education and the development of public discourses was to become a feature of the social existence of the non-elite masses. Elitist social reformers exhibited an indication towards innovation without severing the umbilical cord that connected them to tradition. They adopted a liberal attitude towards the women’s question. Whereas, non-elite social reformers demonstrate a keener comprehension of the colonial context of the evolving discourse of enlightenment and were also acutely aware of caste dimensions of the women’s question. As caste forms an inseparable aspect of Indian social reality, non-elite social reformers oriented the enlightenment discourse towards a simultaneous critique of caste and the women’s questions. That India’s history is a history of the four fold varma system is acknowledged by no less a person than the eminent historian V.K. Rajwade who states,

“The history of the four fold Varma system is primarily a history of the women and Shudras in the system. In this grand theatre of history one comes across the characters of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya on one hand, who are forever engrossed in making efforts aimed at securing and stabilising their positions of social pre-eminence while on the other hand is the character of the Shudra who is forever involved in strenuous labour in a Herculean attempt that aims to destabilise the position of the other. In this affair, victory at times crowns the Brahmin and at times is won by the Shudra. Both parties in this conflict go on unceasingly. Yet at times, they take recourse to the third character, namely, woman, and many a times resolve the conflict through a compromise mediated by her ... In this the

character of Brahmin should be considered to be superior to all others, the Kshatriya and Vaishya mostly act in accordance with the Brahmin's instructions."

The satyashodhak³ non brahmin⁴, dalit⁵ social reforms who specifically diverted their attention and efforts towards emancipating the conditions of living of women and Shudras in this 4 fold varna system.

Critical analysis of the systems of Indian social life was undertaken by British administrators and Christian missionaries albeit in the context of their class interest and from the perspective of colonial hegemony. This analysis was primarily centred around the status and conditions of women in society. British colonialist administrative historians played a significant role in creating a moral legitimacy, for imperialist policies in India. History writing by these historians as also similarly inspired writing by others compared the British woman and the Indian woman in a decontextualized manner and demonstrated that the Indian woman occupied a meagre, neglected position in Indian society. Denigrating Indian culture and demonstrating the inferior position of women in it was a means to the acquisition of cultural hegemony.

The Indian response to this relentless campaign of acquiring hegemony witnesses the crystallising of two distinct positions in Indian society. Traditionalists, refusing to acknowledge this issue of women's status as a problem, adopted a "status quo" stance wherein the status of women was a non-negotiable issue as it formed an inseparable part of a timeless tradition. On the other hand, reformists acknowledged the problem and its severity and to emphasize the need to reform took to rummaging through the scriptures. A common strand that linked the 2 camps was their recourse to the ancient Brahmanical scriptures in search of a justification for their distinct position about reforms in status and condition of women.

Dadoba Pandurang and his associates established the Manav Dharma Sabha on the basis of principles of human dignity and equality. Dadoba Pandurang and Ram Balakrishna along with some reformists in Mumbai made efforts for religious reforms and social reforms through the Paramahansa Sabha. The Prarthana Samaj gave equal importance to both social reforms and religious reforms under the leadership of academic stalwarts and men of high moral fibre such as Justice M.G. Ranade and Dr. R.G.Bhandarkar. The Prarthana Samaj laboured for eradication of caste distinctions and for the betterment of the status and condition of women in society.

The Arya Samaj stressed the primacy of the Vedas and severely condemned the Puranas. The Arya Samaj stressed that in the Vedic period caste distinction were not based on birth and actively supported such

social reform measures as women's education, widow re-marriage etc. Though the Arya Samajists were supportive of the efforts to ameliorate the condition of Shudras it is noteworthy that in case of women's education they accepted a system of education based on the idea of Varnashrama dharma (i.e. of division of society into 4 varnas namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra; and of human life into 4 stages or ashrams, namely Bramacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha & Sanyas) The founder of the Samaj, Swami Dayananda Saraswati adopted a position that education provided to women must be compatible to their Varna. Hence, a Brahmana women must receive a Veda-centric education, a Kshatriya woman be trained in war and polity, a Vaishya woman be tutored about commerce and a shudra woman be trained to serve.

Reformers like R.G. Bhandarkar stressed that the key to comprehensive social transformation was a radical reordering of religion. Hence social reformers concentrated their energies on religious reform in the context of social reform and attempted to resolve the women's question in the context of religious reforms. Religion and the then prevailing colonial polity were patriarchal and hence, a comprehensive social transformation essentially demanded a strategy that would attempt an annihilation of this Patriarchy. However, inherent limitations of the elitist social reform movement meant that their strategies would result in a thriving Patriarchy. The periodical "Durpun" initiated and edited by Balshastrri Jambhekar was to voice the issues related to the women's question. The Durpun advocated women's education and widow re-marriage and quoted scriptural evidences. The periodical referred to history and tradition when explaining the unavoidable necessity of women's reforms to its readership of the emerging bourgeoisie Brahmin intelligentsia. Pitting rituals against scriptures, the periodical demonstrated that the scriptures were supportive of the need to reform. The reformist and traditionalist interpretation of the scriptures differed significantly and yet both camps based their arguments on an ideological strategy that condoned social inequality and patriarchal domination. The reformists countered traditionalists in the confines of a cultural universe framed by Brahmanism that centred around such concepts as "Strisvabhav" (nature of women), "Stricharitra". Elite Brahmin intellectuals committed to social reforms adopted a position based on Brahmanical scriptures to deliver justice to women in a world devotedly bound to unjust traditions. However, this quoting of scriptures further strengthened the patriarchal unequal caste system and in this scriptural cacophony issues related to the emancipation of the shudra women were completely sidelined.

Champions of women's reform, such as Dadoba Pandurang, Lokahitawadi Justice Ranade, Agarkar etc. frequently took recourse to scriptural evidences to validate their positions and views. They argued about the necessity of educating women and widow remarriage by referring to the liberal patriarchy in the early Vedic period that encouraged both practices. R.G. Bhandarkar emphasized that due attention be paid to the Indian family system and to Indian culture when planning for women's University education, and hence women studying in Universities should be imparted sound training in home science. Dr. Bhandarkar along with Maharshi Karve must be considered to be the progenitor of the idea of home science for women. Bhandarkar merely postulated an idea, while Karve established a network of institutions to actualise the idea.

Though elite social reformers prioritised issues of child marriage, widow remarriage, tonsuring of widows, and women's education in the social reform movement, a number of prominent reformers from amongst them often shied away from action for lack of courage. An important case in point being that of Justice Ranade. Moderate leader of the reformers and intellectuals, Ranade, after being widowed was urged to practice his precepts regarding widow remarriage. Ranade did marry again, but not to a widow. Ranade's second marriage was to a child wherein the 31-year-old jurist married a 13-year-old girl child and justified it by stressing his considerations of his old father's affectionate feelings. Another reformer, Justice Gokhale married a girl child during his first wife's sickness. K.T. Telang was a strong advocate of the idea that a girl be 12 years of age at the time of marriage and yet married off his 7 years old daughter. Dr.R.G.Bhandarkar backed off from marrying his widowed daughter. The novelist Haribhau (H.N.) Apte wrote consistently about widow remarriages in his novels and yet married a girl child after the death of his first wife. Maharshi Karve toiled for the cause of women's education and established homes for women (mahilaasramas) but these efforts were exclusively directed towards middle class upper caste women. Persistent neglect of the issues plaguing women from the lower castes compelled the lower castes to launch their own movements for their emancipation.

Brahmin intellectuals of the 19th century provided the will, ideology and energy that animated the social reform movements for emancipation of women and hence most of the discourse and enterprise remained confined to bettering the plight of the Brahmin women and widows. In the same period, the impetus provided by the dynamics of colonialism resulted in the emerging of non-elite, mass-based sites of social reform. Christian missionary propaganda against the caste system deeply impressed the

non- Brahmin masses. Mahatma Phule, shaped the autonomous, independent identity of self that animated the women and the non-Brahmins into an irrepressible torrent of change. The Satyashodhak (Seekers of Truth) movement established by Phule spread across Maharashtra, awakened the masses and journeyed a new route of change. As the movement aimed at a comprehensive transformation it became a new ideological strategy and evolved into an alternative civilisational paradigm. In this alternative universe, the women's question was discussed with its multi-dimensionality in a comprehensive manner that enabled the resolution of the same. So, it is imperative that Mahatma Phule and the Satyashodhak movement be studied as the progenitors of the movement that aimed at the total freedom of Indian women.

Mahatma Phule and his movement initiated the detailed, contextual and critical study of caste and patriarchy, issues that hitherto had been neglected by the elite social reformers. For this, they used sources such as Brahminical texts and scriptures, but while analysing the cultural transaction of this literature they employed the categories of caste and gender and thereby brought forth an entirely novel interpretation of this sacred literature.

Phule stated that the Brahmins composed the scriptures to emphasize and strengthen such social norms as Brahmanical social hegemony, the Brahmin dominated caste system and maltreatment of women in society. He added that selfish men motivated by their self centred masculinity composed selfish scriptures in which they wrote against women and used it to ill-treat women.

The Brahmanical religious literature asserts that as compared to a man, a woman has loose morals and is adulterous. Championing the cause of women Phule exposed the inadequacies & faults of these Brahmanical beliefs. He said that as compared to men, women are fundamentally loving, honest, modest whereas men are biased, treacherous, deceitful, adventurous, cruel, always indulging in new, terrible acts of barbarity. Phule identifies lack of education and the responsibilities of motherhood to be the causes of frailty in women. He demonstrates that men are responsible for all social deficiencies. Phule believes that the avaricious tendencies of men are responsible for such anti-women social customs as polygamy, restrictions on widow marriage, abortions, foeticide, sati, marriages between the girl child & older man etc.

In the 19th century, when those involved with the Satyashodhak movement started thinking about the Shudra women, they encountered several difficulties. Information regarding the status and condition of these women wasn't well documented. The educational attainments of even men

from these castes were negligible. Even if colonialism created educational opportunities for these castes it was difficult for women from these castes to self-express. The circumstances of their existence, the overwhelming force of tradition based on the unequal caste system and patriarchy, played a role in the silencing of any attempt to self-express by the Shudra woman.

The "Social System" had condemned the shudra woman to a life of drudgery and ceaseless toil that involved hard physical labour. Tradition demanded that if she failed to perform her tasks, she be humiliated & punished for it. Hence, even if she desired to express herself, it was impossible for her to do so. Surplus time to consider the need and means to self-express and to actualize such thoughts was hard to come by. Hence, it is inappropriate to expect a "text" that encodes the life & times of the 19th century shudra woman. There are exceptions to this, eg. Mukta Salve's essay and the references to the plight of the shudra woman in the writings of Phule. These writings do act as a text, but the presence of such inadequate texts & the absence of a full-bodied literary text is too significant & indicative of a larger malaise afflicting the nineteenth century Indian society. It is on this backdrop that one should appreciate the efforts made by the Satyashodhak movement to educate women, to fashioning a new route to liberty through literacy.

In the absence of education, Shudras lacked knowledge, mobility, and capital and hence had to live a life of deprivation. This is pithily summed up in a verse composed by Phule. He says,

“For lack of education, intellect was lost,
For lack of intellect, mobility was lost.
For lack of mobility, capital was lost,
Without capital, the Shudras were depressed
All these evils, due to being uneducated.”¹⁶

Convinced of this chain of causation that leads to deprivation amongst Shudras, the Satyashodhak movement concentrated its attention & energies on the education of women, the Shudras and those below them. Identifying education to be the panacea for the multiple ills faced by women and the Shudras, as also to be the only remedy to their material deprivation, Phule and his fellow Satyashodhaks embarked on a mission to educate the deprived & the downtrodden.

The first public act of Phule's enterprise was the establishing of a school for girls in 1848, in Pune. An 1852-1853 record of the report of the Board of Education reveals that Phule taught daily for 4 hours in this school for girls and had trained his wife Savitribai to be a teacher. As

categorically stated in this report, the credit for establishing the first school for girls by natives, goes to Phule, who is credited with having started the first library. As the school admitted learners from the untouchable Mahar and Mang communities, Phule is also the founder of the first educational enterprise that catered to these communities.

By arousing the members of their respective communities and convincing them of the need to educate their daughters, Ranaba Mahar & Lahuji Bin Rao Raut Mang, greatly assisted Phule in his educational endeavours. Sadashiv Ballal Gavande helped Phule's school by providing it with a plot of land and some money.

The Satyashodhak movement vigorously worked to demonstrate the pitiable condition and economic exploitation of widows in Indian Society. The movement exposed the conspiracy of Brahmin patriarchy in opposing widow re-marriage & held the Brahminical scriptures to be responsible for this deplorable state of affairs. The movement refused to accept the prohibition on widow marriages & adopted the practice of marrying widows (The ceremony used for the purpose is called as Paat Lavane in Marathi & was well known amongst non-Brahmin Maharashtrians.) The movement made special efforts to foster dignity for the remarried widow, her spouse & their offsprings in society. As Satyashodhak ideas spread like a conflagration, hundreds of widows were married in Vayagaon, Ahmednagar, Saswad, Bhimthadi, Indapur, Shelgaon, Varkute etc. Consequently, the number of non-Brahmin widows was drastically reduced when compared to Brahmin widows.¹⁹

Elite traditionalists offered scriptural justification for the practice of tonsuring the head of a Brahmin widow. Some other Brahmin social reformers attempted to oppose this practice by taking recourse to the same scriptures to prove that the ancient texts do not support the practice. Satyashodhak reformers aiming for an absolute eradication of this abomination refused to accord any sanctity or primacy to the scriptures. With the aid of some compassionate & concerned European women, the Satyashodhaks succeeded in highlighting this uniquely Indian practice of barbarity at the international level.

As compared to the elite social reformers, the Satyashodhaks analysed Sati from a different, more materialistic perspective. To them, Sati was a consequence of the totalitarian refusal to let the widow have a material life of her own. At the same time the movement also revealed the dialectical relationship between the perpetuation of patriarchy & the encoding of complementary laws in the scriptures as enunciated in Brahmanism. Brahmin apologists for the practice of Sati claimed it to be an act rooted in the wife's overwhelming passion for her husband. Satyashodhak

reformers countered this by asking as to why don't men burn themselves on the pyres of their wives in a similar act that demonstrates passionate love & devotion. The stony silence that greeted this question absolutely unveiled the shameless patriarchal psyche that animated Brahmin beliefs.

The first Indian trade unionist was the Satyashodhak leader Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. He vociferously demanded the enactment of appropriate legislation that would address issues related to women workers such as working hours, wages proportionate to work, facilities at the workplace, leisure during work, issues of education of children of women workers, pregnancy leave etc. As Lokhande took into consideration the caste-class context of women workers he was able to organize their street demonstrations wherein thousands of women took to the streets to protest in support of their demands.²⁰

The writings 19th century author, Tarabai Shinde reveal a "feminist" understanding that is comparable to the feminism that evolved in the 1970's. She states that religion, patriarchy & the caste system ruthlessly exploit women. In her much celebrated work, "Stree Purush Tuluna" (Comparison between Men and Women) she interpreted the epics Ramayana & Mahabharata, the scriptures, history, contemporary novels, theatre, newspaper writings etc. from a entirely new and comparative perspective. In her writings she exposed the treacherous, conspiratorial ways of men & women who behaved like men. To her the male was the very empire of such evils as thieving, adultery, homicide, burglary, treachery, corruption, misuse of public money, deceit, fraud etc.²¹

The Satyashodhak movement convincingly demonstrated that all women in Indian society aren't similarly discriminated against. In the context of the caste based patriarchy sanctified by religion, the Brahmin women face discrimination mainly in the domestic domain, as that in almost all cases constitutes her material world. Peasant woman faces discrimination both at home & outside where she works & also when she performs forced labour (vethbegari).

In the early decades of the 20th century the Satyashodhak movement widely branched off across Maharashtra & thereby attracted a significant section of the middle castes and peasants. Consequently, it became a part of the non-Brahmin movement which later on merged into the Indian National Congress. Prominent social reformers of the 20th century like Keshavrao Jedhe, Dinkarrao Javalkar & Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, when addressing the women's question continued to be inspired by the ideals of the Satyashodhak movement.

The King of Kolhapur Chatrapati Shahu established a teachers' training College in 1882 for the training of women teachers. He also

patronized & paid for the education of a brilliant student Krishnabai Kelavkar. After graduating as a trained Doctor from the Grant Medical College, Mumbai. The King appointed her as an Assistant Doctor in the Albert Edward Memorial Hospital. She pursued her further studies in medicine in London with the assistance of a scholarship granted by the King. ²²

Overcoming all familial opposition, the King encouraged his widowed daughter-in-law Indumati Ranisaheb to pursue her studies till matriculation. He also paid attention to the education of Shudra girls. In 1907 he established a separate School for girls from the untouchable communities & provided it with a grant of Rs. 96/- ²³ Women of the royal family were educated in such subjects as fine arts, sports, weaving etc. He also handed over to them his religious responsibilities and activities. ²⁴ This, obviously led to the strengthening of religious influences and values which according to the dictates of tradition must be imbibed by women.

Male social reformers like Bhaskarrao Jadhav, K. B. Babar, Shripatrao Shinde, Annasaheb Lathe, C. P. Patil, Shankarrao More, V. R. Shinde also provide special attention to the education of women. This led to the formation of the “Akhil Bharatiya Stree Shikshan Parishad” (All India Women’s Education Conference). Through such ventures, non-Brahmin Women from the masses started thinking about their education as also acting on such thoughts. This led to the evolving of such women leaders as Krishnabai Madhavrao Desai and Maharani Chinnabaisaheb.

Maratha leaders like Jedhe & Javalkar seriously pondered over matters related to the education of the non-Brahmin, Bahujan women but made lewd, derogatory remarks about women from the Brahmin & untraceable castes. This resulted in intense caste rivalries. The using of “women” as a discursive category in this further vitiated matters as also denigrated women. This gynocentric, caste based humiliation of rivals could be identified as a major limitation of the non-Brahmin, Bahujan movement.

Chhatrapati Shahu enacted revolutionary reforms concerning women in his principality, when in 1919 he legislated against child marriage & raised the age of girls at the time of marriage to be not less than 14 years. In the same law a provision was made for girls who were more than 18 years old. Such girls, according to the law, were vested with the right to exercise their choice regarding their marriage. ²⁵ This measure of legally vesting girls with the freedom to choose was supported by Shripatrao Shinde & his Paper “Vijayi Maratha” & Mukundrao Patil & his paper “Dinbandhu”. A movement to “prohibit child marriage” spread across Maharashtra. In June 1926 Annasaheb Lathe proposed a legislation to outlaw child marriages & support marriages between consenting adults.

In 1917, in another remarkable act, Chatrapati Shahu enacted a legislation that legally validated widow marriages. The law also called for the due recording of such marriages. Such records rated by the state became an instrument that would do justice to a remarried widow & her offsprings in case of any prospective problem in her marriage. Endogamous marital relations strengthen the perpetuation of the caste system by reading a fiction of “pure” castes. Hence, they condemn all inter caste marital relations as impure & thereby subject women to a totalising tyranny. Realising the role played by the prohibition of inter-caste marriages in the perpetuation of caste, Vitthalbhai Patel introduced a bill in the Central Legislative Assembly that sought to encourage inter-caste marriages. Chatrapati Shahu enacted a legislation that was supportive of Patel’s Bill in 1919.

As marriages were to be recorded with the govt. of Kolhapur, a married woman could aspire to a share in the husband’s assets in the event of marital discord. Even within the family, a married woman was subjected to humiliation on account of often flimsy reasons eg. she is unable to deliver a son, isn’t beautiful, unable to become a mother (i.e. is barren), refuses to submit to the husband’s desires, is uncivilized etc. To put an end to such humiliation in future, in 1919, Chatrapati Shahu enacted a law that sought to prohibit torture and atrocities against women in their marital homes. The law was the first of its kind to be ever promulgated in India.

In the context of the caste based Hindu society, children born of a wedlock, sanctified by religion are always privileged in matters of social status & shares in the property of their male parent as compared to those that the same male parent fathers in a relationship that isn’t sanctified by religion. Chatrapati Shahu enacted a legislation whereby such illegitimate children could partake of a portion in the male parent’s property as their inheritance thereby setting aside the exclusive primacy of the legitimate offsprings.

As compared to the elite social reformers Chatrapati Shahu & the non-Brahmin movement concentrated their energies on resolving the women’s question in the context of the law. They also paid some attention to the problems faced by women from the depressed communities whose bodies were exploited for tortuous labour, sexual gratification & superstitious entertainment, i.e. women such as the Devadasi, Murali, jogteen, Bhavin, Nayakin, Kalavantin, Basavi, Devali, Matangi, Sharani etc. but did not provide any concrete programme or plan of action for their emancipation.

Of all the women in Indian society, the women from the Dalit communities have been subjects of excruciating deprivation, neglect &

tyranny. So acutely negligible has been their status that if one is to historically map her deprivation, one encounters an absolute absence of sources for the same. Sources that would enable a construction of the past are profusely available in the Indian context, but if one is to investigate the same for any clues, references to the status & condition of the Dalit women, one encounters insurmountable hindrances. So total is her neglect since historical times that rarely has she been written about as an autonomous subject. Mahatma Phule first addressed this epistemic problem followed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The pre-Ambedkar Dalit movement can be studied through the thoughts & enterprises of such committed activists as Janoji Khandare, Gopal Baba Valangkar, Shivram Jamba Kamble, Vithoba Ramji Moonpande, Kisan Jagoji Bansode, Kalicharan Nandagavali. In the pre-Ambedkar period, one also comes across some organizations that strove for the upliftment of the Dalits as “Antyaj Samaj Committee”, “Putrishala”, “Bahishkrut Bharat Samaj”, “Nutan Somavanshiya Hitachintak Samaj”, Madhyaprant Varhad Mahar Parishad”. Dr. Ambedkar through his writings, movements and law making aimed at the liberation of all women across India. If one analyses the “Hindu Code Bill” and provisions of the Indian Constitution one can see Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas regarding the liberation of all Indian women. One can also trace a certain evolution that begins with Phule, proceeds through Chatrapati Shahu and culminates in Dr. Ambedkar.

Conclusion

The first stage of social reforms concerning women in the 19th century in Maharashtra was elitist. Though this movement did succeed in highlighting the woman’s question, the elitist patronizing patriarchy of this stage that did more to deliberate than actually empower hindered substantial action. Transcending obstacles and delivering the instruments that would empower and liberate was largely due to the incessant efforts by non-Brahmin reformers such as Phule, Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar. The issues related to the women’s liberation movement were never linear or simple. It involved several stages and trends and there is a bewildering diversity regarding their potentials and limitations.

Notes

1. “Elite class is a small but influential section that is intellectual, efficient & has the potential to lead”

-S. M. Garge (ed.) Bharatiya Samajvigbyan Kosh, Vol. I, page 66

2. I tihasacharya V.K. Rajwade Samagra Sahitya, Vol. 12, pg. 206-‘-7 – (ed) M. B. Shah, Dhule, 1998
3. This Satyashodhak ideological trend includes Mahatma Phule, Sanvitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde, Vishram Ramji Ghole, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, Tanubai Birje.
4. This non-Brahmin ideological trend includes Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Sitaram Keshav Bole, Anadrao Narayanrao Surve, Kirtivanrao Nimbalkar, Gangaji Kalbhor, Pandurang Jadhav, Dajirao Vichare, Shamrao Lingade, Keshavrao Jedhe, Dinkarrao Jawalkar, Annasaheb Lathe etc.
5. The Dalit ideological trend that strove for women’s liberty includes Dr. Babasaheb Ambedka, Dadasheb Gaikwad, Shantabai Dani, Shivram Jamba Kamble, Gopalbaba Valangkar & many “others”.
6. Refer i) History of British India- James Mill (ed.), Wilson H. H. – Vol. I, London, 1884, (Refer the original article)
7. Ranadepraniti Samajsudharneche Tattwamimansa - G. B. Sardar, Pune, 1973, Page 19.
8. “The President of the Paramashansa Sabha, Ram Balkrishna was votary of widow remarriage and had liberal opinion about women, their education & their freedom.” - Prarthana Samajacha Itihas – D. G. Viadya, Mumbai, 1927, pg. 16
9. *Ibid.*, P. 85
10. For more information refer- i) Striprashanachi Vatchal – Bhagwat, Vidyut, Pune, 2004, pg. 94 ii) “All women & men have the right to study the Vedas..... Not teaching the same to such women & Shudras who have the capacity to assimilate such knowledge must be regarded as the foolery, selfishness & stupidity of the teachers.....” - Satyarth Prakash (7th edition) – Swami Dayanand Saraswati, New Delhi, 1968, pt. 52
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 53
12. “What applies to the individual is applicable to the nation. Real progress calls for the propagation of the progressive religion. For achieving political rights one may convene a national congress or a provincial congress or may convene a social conference to bring about social reforms, but so long as there isn’t religions awakening, all such efforts would be vain. To begin with there has to be a development of the soul, progress of soul.” Adhunik Bharat – S. G. Javdekar, Pune, 1979, P.. 45. (These words by R. G. Bhandarkar are representative of the reformers’ belief in religious reforms. Consequently in the case of women’s question, it is abundantly clear that reformers were as interested as the traditionalists in consulting the scriptures.)
13. Guruvarya Dr. Bhandarkar Charitra – Srinivas Narayan Karnataki, Pune 1927, P.. 224
14. Maharashtraateel Strivishayak Sudharnavadi ani Bahujankendri Chalvali (1848-1956) - Narayan Bhosale, unpublished thesis, University of Pune, 2007, pg. 329
15. *Op cit.*
16. Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmaya (ed.), Y. D. Phadke, Mumbai, 1991, P. 253.
17. *Ibid.*, P.. 607
18. Dynanodaya, Ahmednagar, 15 September, 1853

19. Satyashodhak Samaj Parishad Adhyaksheeya Bhashane va Karyavruttant – (ed) Gajmal Mali, Aurngabab, 2000, Pp. 211, 252, 255, 259
20. Bharatiya Kamgar Chalvaliche Jamak Narayan Meghaji Lokhande – Manohar Kadam, Pune 1996, pg. 48, 83
21. Stripurush Tulana – Tarabai Shinde, Pune 2004, pg. 20
22. Rajarshi Shahu Chatrapati – Dhananjay Keer, Mumbai, 2001, pg. 111
23. Shahu Chatrapatinche Niwadak Adesh – (ed.) Bhaskar Dhatavekar, Mumbai, pg. 139, 145
24. Raja Shahu ani Samaj Prabodhan – Ganparao Subarao Suryavanshi, Ichalkaranji, 1978, pg. 55
25. Rajarshi Shahu Smarak Granth – Jaysignrao Pawar, Kolhapur, 2001, pg. 1016

Glossary

- * Paat Lavane – It refers to the marriage of a woman marries again in the event when the first husband is alive or dead.
- V. G. Apte, Marathi Shabdaratnakar, Mumbai, 1991, P. 344.
- * Devdasi – A woman who serves the deity and lives like a courtesan. Her regular duties include cleaning the temple, fanning the deity, dancing and singing before the deity, dancing in front of the deity's procession etc. In the Indian temples, the idol made up of stone, metal, wood etc. is treated as if it is a living being and is similarly cared for. It is bathed, decorated, clothed, fed on a daily basis as if it is living. Doing this is called as worshipping the deity. In the middle ages, this idea was carried forward and temples were equipped with women slaves (*devdasis*) who were meant to provide physical companionship to the deity. For this, temple managers, started purchasing women or often devotees dedicated their daughters to the temple for this purpose. There are seven categories of devdasis depending on the way in which the temple has acquired them, namely Shudraganika, Datta, Vikrita Gopika, Alankrita, etc.
(Bhartiya Sanskriti Kosh, Vol. IV, pg. 446, Pune 1994)
- * *Murali* – A female devotee of the God Khandoba who is primarily worshipped in Western Maharashtra, Northern Karnataka, Parts of Madhya Pradesh is called as a *Murali*. It is commonly believed in these regions that if the newborns are unable to survive long, one prays to the God Khandoba that if the child lives on it would be offered to the God. If the child, thus,

blessed with life is a girl, she is married off to the God & is called as a *Murali* while the boy child offered to the God is called a “*Waghya*”.

- (*Ibid.*, Vol VII. Pg. 435) (1972)

- * *Jogatin* – It is a category of devotees of the Goddess Yellamma, that occurs pre-dominantly in Maharashtra & Karnataka. The *Jogatin* is married off to a God and subsequently can never have a human spouse, is forced to lead the life of the spouse of God.

- (*Ibid.*, Vol. III, P. 672, 1999)

- * *Bhavin / Nayakin* – Women from a specific caste in places like Ratnagiri, Sawantwadi, Goa, Karwar etc. i.e. Primarily along the Western coast of Maharashtra & Karnataka are called as *Bhavin / Naykin*. It is believed that the *Bhavin* is a consequence of the mingling of the *Bhandari* & Maratha castes in this region. The *Bhavin*'s work includes cleaning the precincts of the temple, smearing the temple floor with cow dung (in the absence of flooring), cleaning the temple lamps, fanning the deity etc.

Ibid., Vol 6, pg. 508, 2003.

- * *Basavi* – During the medieval times in Karnataka, there was a tradition among certain castes of offering at least one girl from every family to the deity. The girl was called as a *Basavi*. The girl was married off to the deity or to a sword. After marriage, upper caste males sexually exploited her, but it was made to seem that she was exercising her choice in these cases. If the *Basavi* conceived of a female child as the consequence of such relationships, the child was also treated as a *Basavi*.

Ibid., Vol 4, pg. 447, 1994.

RECASTING 'INDIAN' WOMAN AND MARATHI THEATRE: A CASE STUDY OF *SHARADA*

JASWANDI WAMBURKAR-UTAGIKAR¹

Women's reform of the 19th century

Changing political economy of the nineteenth Century gave rise to the emergence of the middle classes in Maharashtra.² The newly educated middle class men visualized themselves not as passive recipients of the western ideas but as conscious agents of social change. For these western educated, middleclass, liberal men, usually clubbed under the title "reformers", women's question was an issue of primary concern in the early and mid nineteenth century. With the exception perhaps of the issue of caste and untouchability, all major questions taken up by these reformers were directly connected with women, e.g., female infanticide, child marriage, ban on women's education, *sati*, tonsuring of women's head, ban on widow remarriage, custom of *Devadasi* etc. The low status of the Indian woman was postulated as a reason for the degeneration of the Indian culture and civilization even by the imperialists. The social reform movement that grew within the framework of liberal philosophy proposed a democratic set-up in the Indian traditional, male dominated, caste-ridden social structure.

The women's reform movement can be classified into three categories³ on the basis of the stand and methods adopted by the various social reformers for bringing change in women's lives:

¹ Senior Lecturer in History, SNTD Women's University, Mumbai.

² Shridhar (Raja) Dixit, *Ekonisavva Shatakatil Maharashtra, Madhyamvargacha Uday*, (Marathi) Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University Of Pune, Pune, 1998.

³ For more details, see-Jaswandi Wamburkar, *Itihas, Strivad ani Maharastratil Strivishayak Vastav: Vibhavari Shirurkar: Vishesh Abhyas*, (Marathi) Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Pune , Pune, 2006, pp. 21-22.

1. **Reformist trend:** This trend aimed at bringing full-fledged change with a slow and steady pace. Though the women's reform was based on the principles of humanism and equality, the reformers of this group sought to get sanction of either tradition or shastras for any small change that they envisaged. Reformers such as Balshastris Jambekar (1812-1846), Dadoba Pandurang (1814-1882), Vishnushastri Pandit (1827-1876), M.G. Ranade (1842-1901), K.T. Telang (1850-1893), Maharshi Karve (1858-1962), Kashibai Kanitakar (1861-1948), Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924) and institutions such as Prarthana Samaj (1867), Aryamahila Samaj (1882), Sevasadan (1885) belonged to the reformist trend.
2. **Revivalist trend:** This trend aspired at reviving Indian tradition to combat the invasion of western culture. Personalities such as Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), Lokmanya Tilak (1856-1920) and institutions like Arya Samaj represented this trend. They reconstructed the Indian woman in a revivalist fashion-as a self-sacrificing and '*pativrata*' wife and mother.
3. **Radical trend:** These reformers took a radical stand for women's reform. They based women's reform movement on the principles of freedom, equality and rationalism. They took a radical approach in reforming the tradition. Few reformers of this group developed a critique of the interrelationship between women's question and patriarchy. They envisaged equality and mutual consent as the basis of the man-woman relationship. Reformers like Lokhitwadi (1823-1892), Mahatma Phule (1828-1890), Savitribai Phule (1831-1897), Tarabai Shinde (1840-1910), Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) and institutions such as Satyashodhak Samaj (1873) belonged to this stream.

The New Patriarchy and Reconstruction of 'Indian' woman

The change created an imbalance in the power-relations in the caste-based social structure on one hand and within the patriarchal family-structure on the other. It necessitated the redefinition of Indian identity in respect of man and woman and thereby a recasting of gender relations. The reformers who had to make a difficult choice between 'tradition' and 'modernity' constantly faced the threat of the 'loss of identity' by total Westernisation of the Indian culture. The creation of the 'myth of the

golden age' was an attempt to escape the burden of the contemporary degenerated status of woman.⁴ However, the so-called egalitarian movement initiated mostly by the western-educated men always aimed at change within the patriarchal structure and not structural change.⁵ The old indigenous patriarchal traditions were replaced by the creation of a new patriarchy.⁶ The key questions before the reformers were- How to define the 'new' Indian woman in contrast to the Western woman as also different from the 'old' Indian woman and the Indian man? How to reconstruct gender relations in the context of the Indian society?

The 'crisis of identity' was overcome by the creation of a new 'Hindu-Aryan identity' to combat the denunciation of the indigenous culture. The problem of the relationship between 'private' and 'public' spheres was resolved by consigning the ideal Indian woman to the private domain. She was constructed through a 'peculiar amalgam of both the Brahmanical ideal of the chaste and self-sacrificing '*Pativrata*' woman and the Victorian model of the housewife and companionate spouse.'⁷

It was expected that the new woman should possess "the typically bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social norms of disciplining-of orderliness, thrift, cleanliness and a personal sense of responsibility, the practical skills of literacy, accounting, hygiene and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world".⁸

Majority of social reformers and champions of women's education proposed different syllabi for men and women, suitable to the different roles that they were expected to perform. Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962) who established the first Women's University in India, has narrated in his autobiography that he had the model of a Japanese Women's University before him. He writes,

⁴ For more details, see- Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sanghari, Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali For Women, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 27-87.

⁵ For more details, see-Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' in *Ibid.*, pp. 233-253.

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

⁷ Rosalind O'Hanlon, *A Comparison Between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, OUP, Madras, 1994, pp. 14-15.

⁸ Partha Chatterjee cited in Judith E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.52.

“We cannot support the other movement which aims at the so-called emancipation of women. In opposition to this tendency we lay emphasis on home life as the chief sphere of women’s activities. Here her proper place is found as wife and as mother, not indeed as a tool or ornament, but as an active partaker in the humanitarian and national spirit which should animate a home.”⁹

Moro Vitthal Walvekar launched a women’s magazine in 1877 named ‘*Grihini*’ (housewife). Writings in *Grihini* would concentrate on themes “useful to women”, eg. Women in Puranas, knowledge of nature and health, cuisine, stitching etc.¹⁰ ‘Native Opinion’ in its issue of 14th September 1884 opined that lower caste women and prostitutes should not be admitted in schools. Moreover, ‘subjects’ such as cookery, medicine, self-religion, childcare, accounting, and grammar should be taught to women.¹¹ Various studies of autobiographical writings of nineteenth century women amply demonstrate to what extent women had internalised these ideals of womanhood.¹²

Women’s reform, literature and gender

Literature is one of the many forms of cultural representation (Eg., music, painting, film, advertising) in which gender relations are routinely depicted. Gender is conceptualized as a social and cultural construct based on the biological category of sex. Literature can both reinforce gender stereotypes and create new more liberating representations of gender. Factors such as race, class, age, nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, language and gender all influence the creation and reception of literature. Literature performs both as a social product and as a social force in its historical context.¹³ It reflects, perhaps unconsciously, the socio-cultural ethos to

⁹ Dhondo Keshav Karve, *Atmavrutta Va Charitra* (Marathi), Hingne Shtri Shikshan Sanstha, Pune, third edition, 1958, p. 350.

¹⁰ Moro Vitthal Walvekar cited in Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹ Cited in Pratibha Ranade, *Strimuktichya Maharashtraatil Paulakhuna, Striprashnanchi Charcha, Ekonisave Shatak* (Marathi), Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1992, p. 52.

¹² For more details see-Meera Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2007. Jaswandi Wamburkar, *Feminist History and Women’s Writings*, unpublished paper, March 2003.

¹³ Terry Eagleton cited in Raja Dixit, *Itihas, Samajavichar Ani Keshavasut*, (Marathi) Lokvagamaya Gruha, Mumbai, 1993.

which it belongs and at the same time it consciously aims at creating such an ethos.¹⁴

There is a close connection between the women's reform movement and the literature of the nineteenth century Maharashtra. Printed literature of all sorts- plays, novels, essays, and newspapers grew dramatically over the nineteenth century in Maharashtra. It was seen as one of the main instruments of social change. Almost all the battles of social values and social structure in Maharashtra were also played on the battleground of literature.¹⁵ The new literature dealing with women's issues consciously or unconsciously promoted the new image of Indian woman. Baba Padamanjee's 'Yamunaparyatana' (1857), first novel in Marathi and H. N. Apte's novels- 'Madhali Sthiti' (1885) and 'Pan Lakshat Kon Ghetu' (1893) can be seen as representative examples.

Era of Marathi Drama and Women's reform:

Vishnudas Bhave staged the first play 'Seeta Swayamvar' in Marathi in Sangli in 1843. In the first phase of the Marathi theatre, the dramatists took up either mythological or historical themes or translated works from English or Sanskrit. A new genre called 'Sangeet Naatak' or Musical Play evolved and gradually became very popular. The newly rising middle class used theatre as a cultural tool to establish its hegemony.

It is noteworthy that Vinayak Mahadeo in his play 'Nal Natak' suggested the importance of the custom of adult marriage and marriage based on mutual love as early as 1861.¹⁶ The plays 'Swairsakesha' (1871), 'Manorama' (1871) and 'Saubhagyarama' (1884) discussed the problem of untimely widowhood and championed the cause of widow-remarriage. Kanitkar's 'Tarunishikshana Natika' discussed the evil effects of women's education. As a reaction to it, another play with the title 'Sushikshit Stree' highlighted the significance of women's education. A number of social plays dealt with social issues like dowry and marriages between very young bride and very old groom. Eg., *Sangeet Vasantotsava* (1880), 'Jarathodwaha' (1890), 'Kanyavikraya Dushparinam' (1895). Govind Ballal Deval's 'Sharada' (1899) is considered as the most prominent of the social plays in modern Marathi.

¹⁴ Aravind Deshpande, *Literature and Social Structure in the 19th Century Maharashtra*, 1986, (Unpublished Paper), P.1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 2.

¹⁶ S. G. Malashe, Nanda Apte, 'Vidhava Vivah -Chalaval 1800-1900 (Marathi), Stri Sanshodhan Kendra, Mumbai, 1978, p. 107.

Govind Ballal Deval

Govind Ballal Deval (1855-1916) is considered among the leading dramatists of Nineteenth Century Maharashtra. He served Marathi theatre for thirty years. Born in 1855, he passed the matriculation from Rajaram High School at Kolhapur. He then joined as a teacher at the New English School at Pune. He left that job in 1887. Till his death, he worked as a fulltime writer and dramatist.

His first and prize-winning play '*Durga*' was based on the tragic life-story of Durga. He wrote many more *Sangeet* plays- '*Shap-sambhram*', '*Mruchhakatik*', '*Sanshaykallol*', and '*Zunjarrao*'. All these plays were adapted from Sanskrit or English, and very successful.

The age of consent controversy

'Sharada' (1893?) came on the backdrop of the age of consent bill (1891) controversy. Age of marriage figured prominently in the social reform discourse of the day. Baharamji Malabari along with other social reformers sent a 'Note on Infant Marriage in India' along with another note on 'enforced widowhood' to the British colonial government. The case of Phulmani Dasi¹⁷ of Bengal brought to surface the issue of the age of consent and the miseries of child-brides. Phulamani Dasi, a child-bride of eleven years in Bengal who had not attained puberty, bled to death when her much older husband Hari Maitee forced himself on her. As a result of this shocking incident, fifty-five women doctors sent a petition emphasizing the evil effects of child marriage to the government. This issue evoked unprecedented concern about the problems of child-brides. The age of consent controversy pioneered in Maharashtra soon gathered momentum throughout India. This issue raised a storm in various sections of society and political groups. Thousands of women under the leadership of Pandita Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji and Kashibai Kanitkar gathered in Mumbai to support this bill. Almost two thousand women signed the application supporting the age of consent bill and sent it to the government.¹⁸ Lokmanya Tilak launched scathing criticism against the proposed legislation of the bill and refused to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state.

The play 'Sharada' raged the lid off the custom of child and uneven marriage. It also criticized the custom of dowry. It is a melodrama about a

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.62.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

young girl who is at the receiving end of the rotten social practices. It was a huge success when it was first launched in its times. Well-known novelist Hari Narayan Apte has written introduction to the play 'Sharada'. Apte has congratulated Deval for taking up the issue of Sharada, rather than narrating the unrealistic romantic stories of Urvashi-Pururava and Malati-Madhav.¹⁹ He highlighted the role of drama as the mirror of society. He expressed that the dramatist should take up those social evils, on which the public mind had become numb. He opined that education of public mind along with entertainment should be the objective of drama.

Deval has used satire to ridicule the old man Bhujanganath by making graphic description of the deteriorating physical condition of the old man of seventy-five and by creating a contrast image of the old man and the young and beautiful Sharada. Bhujanganath is an old man of seventy-five, whose all sense organs have degenerated due to old age, who uses dentures and has turned bald. He craves to marry a petit, pretty young girl with long hair, rosy lips, beautiful eyes and pink complexion! The character of Bhujanganath creates wrath in the audience by his statements full of male chauvinism and male lust. Sharada's father, Kanchanbhatta, is an epitome of patriarchal male bias. He believes in patriarchal stereotypes and male superiority over women. He thinks that women's brain is good enough only for the kitchen and chilli powder. He firmly asserts that he alone has the right to decide regarding his daughter's marriage.

The hero of this play, Kodand is an embodiment of the Indian middle class and upper caste man who has taken an oath for the freedom of his country. He expresses the nationalist fervor and consciousness on many occasions. He presupposes that the evil social practices in the 'Hindu' society are responsible for the defeat of the country at the hands of the foreign rule. He carries the 'brown man's burden' of the emancipation of Indian woman. Therefore saving Sharada from the clutches of the uneven marriage and dowry becomes the objective of his life. His opinions that the difference between man and woman is only biological otherwise women are equal to men in all respects show resonance of the liberal feminism. Kodand's revelation that the way man wishes to marry beautiful and young girl, similarly woman aspires to marry young, virtuous and handsome husband expresses the muted desires of the Indian women from centuries. He reminds Sharada and her friends that they being future mothers should not allow their daughters to be sold as commodity! In a way, Kodand becomes the translator of Deval's message of women's

¹⁹ Govind Ballal Deval, *Sangeet Sharada*, (Marathi) with an 'Introduction' by Hari Narayan Apte, 1899, pp.5-8.

reform. He opines that the practice of uneven marriage leads to untimely widowhood, adulteration, which in turn leads to abortion or infanticide etc. The Vijayalakshmi case and many such cases of the nineteenth century are evident of this premise.²⁰ Realizing the miserable condition of the fallen women, Mahatma Phule and Savitribai Phule started an orphanage for the fallen women and their children.

The pertinent question is how Deval has reconstructed Sharada? Sharada is shown as a victim of the evil practice of dowry and uneven marriage. However she is not the passive recipient of her parents' decisions but rather she is vocal about her feelings and opinions throughout the play. She fiercely criticizes her parents for enforcing her to marry a man who is as old as her grandfather. She condemns them for reducing her to a saleable commodity. Her songs 'amhi gai jatichya' and 'tu tak chiruni hi man' echo the voices of the docile and silent Indian womenfolk who had been denied the right to make decisions of their lives from ages. She equates the rearing by her parents to the act of a butcher who feeds the goat ultimately to get more money by selling the plump animal. Sharada's cry for justice must have touched the chords of the spectator's heart. Deval carefully crafted many such songs sung by Sharada. His was an attempt to sensitize public sympathy for Sharada who is the representation of the self-sacrificing and docile Indian woman. Though the play, 'Sharada' focuses the evil effects of the custom of dowry and mismatched marriage, there is a subtext of 'Sharada' i.e. woman's sexuality. The sexual buzz between Sharada and Kodand constitutes the substance of the play, which made it very popular. Sharada expresses discontent for Kodand's decision to remain single. She thinks that the young girls like her have to suffer due to such decisions, which compel them to marry an old man. When Kodand tries to persuade her not to end her life, She asserts that she will alter her decision only if he is ready to marry her. She confesses that she has fallen in love with him and therefore cannot marry somebody else other than him. Sharada emerges as a 'new Indian woman' vocal about her aspirations and desires.

Deval has ended this play very trickily by declaring the marriage of Sharada with Bhujanganth as invalid according to Shastras. This resonates the compulsion of the women's reform movement of that period which was trying to get sanction of the shastras for the social change. Sharada denies running away from the home along with her maternal uncle who

²⁰ S. G. Malashe, Nanda Apte, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 91-92.

wants to set her free. Her submissive act of accepting her father's decision shows the limitations of Sharada i.e. of the new Indian woman.

Sharada in despair attempts to commit suicide. Deval's Sharada cannot show the radical spirit of Tarabai Shinde. Kodand comes to rescue her and agrees to marry with her. Thus Deval's heroine needs the emancipator. This is not the limitation of the dramatist Deval alone but of the women's reform movement of the nineteenth century. Though few women such as Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Kashibai Kanitakar, Ramabai Ranade and others acted as active agents of women's reform movement, they form the microscopic minority of the womenfolk. The middle class men emerged as the emancipator for the Indian women.

The nineteenth century literature was 'the literature of conscience'.²¹ It is the 'guilty reader' who remains at the heart of the 'literature of conscience'. The author invents the 'guilty reader'. However the author will not and cannot push his reader beyond an acceptable level of moral discomfort. Such type of literature thrives on creating and indulging an awareness of 'wrong' in the society. This type of literature uses melodrama to expose the social injustice in the society. The awareness of wrongs is historically prior to the assertion of the rights. Deval who was a full time and mainstream dramatist must have expected his play to be professionally successful. Deval had to limit the message of social reformism as per the level of his audience. Deval received lot of wealth from this play is a clear testimony of the success of his play. That is why Deval's 'Sharada' remains docile and cannot show the radicalism of Tarabai Shinde.

Deval's 'Sharada' played dual role –as the creator and product of the social ethos of the nineteenth century Maharashtra. Deval revolutionized the Marathi drama by lifting it from the realm of fantasy and romance to the level of modern realism. Premchand (1880-1936) wrote a poignant novel "Nirmala" in 1927 with the subtitle 'revolutionary social novel'. It focused on the same issue- a young girl Nirmala's marriage to an elderly widower by her mother who cannot afford to pay a dowry for her.²² The novel was originally serialized in the women's magazine 'Chand' from 1925 to 1926 and was a huge success in its time.

Deval's campaign later escalated into a legislation banning child marriages in 1929, popularly known as the 'Sarda Act' and then rightfully known in Maharashtra as the 'Sharada Act.'

²¹ Alok Rai, *Afterward: Hearing Nirmala's Silence*, in Premchand, *Nirmala Translated and with an Afterward by Alok Rai*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp.197-211.

²² *Ibid.*

DISPENSING “ABSTRACT JUSTICE”: ERLOO BIN NARAYAN—A MAHAR’S QUEST FOR EDUCATION, CIRCA 1856

ARAVIND GANACHARI¹

When Sir Erskine Perry, then President of the Board of Education proposed, that the European boys —“being fully alive to the advantages of education”— must pay an increased fee as against the Natives, and that “We are desirous of filling natives of good caste and superior classes for higher situation in life...”, Edward I. Howard, the Director of Public Instruction, Bombay, commented,

...Government will draw no distinction between its subjects founded on caste or religion or social rank; least of all will it tolerate the establishment of a rule whose irregular partiality shuts the School door to one because he is “fully alive to the advantages of education”, and opens it to another because he is of “good caste” or belongs to the “superior class”.

He, however, qualified his statement by writing in the footnote regarding “caste”: “I regret to say that, in the present state of Native feeling, it has not been found possible to adhere rigidly to this principle, but I hope that exceptional cases will shortly disappear.”² Against the background of such high sounding assumptions and candid admission of helplessness in providing social equality by the British administrators in Western India, this paper seeks to analyse the case of Erloo bin Narayan, a “Mahar”³ from

¹ Professor of History, University of Mumbai.

² *Maharashtra State Archives* (hereinafter MSA), *Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Bombay for the year 1855-56*, pp. 71-72. Though the assertion of E.I. Howard was for doing away discrimination between European children and Natives, he did include a possible similar discrimination between various castes.

³ A *Mahar* or *Mang* and such other castes were stigmatised due to their lowly occupation and with birth becoming a basis of one’s social position in post-Rg Vedic period, came to be denoted as an “untouchable”. Their lowly social status was accorded legitimization by much *Shastraic* justification in the succeeding

Dharwad District of the then Bombay Presidency, who in 1856, through the agency of the 1st Assistant Collector and Magistrate Mr. Stuart M.I. Gordon, sent a petition to the Governor Lord Elphinstone (1853-1860) complaining that he was being denied and discriminated for being a “Mahar” in seeking admission to the Marathi school run by the Government.

On the basis of the correspondence that followed this petition, this paper seeks to argue that the British administration even in the pre-1857 Revolt period, though prided for upholding ‘rule of law’ and dissemination of ‘liberal education’, pandered to the upper castes in perpetuating caste distinction in the field of education. While the administration admitted the injustice done to Narayan and that he had “**Abstract Justice**”, the officials deliberated in detail and finally decided that justice cannot be granted to Narayan in ‘reality’.

The paper also attempts to establish that such official attitude was not fallout of the Revolt of 1857-58 that made the British rulers indifferent to the needs of providing social justice to the weaker sections of the Indian society, but this approach existed from the beginning of their rule in Western India.

The Case of Erloo bin Narayan, though solitary, is elucidative of the official bias—not just the Bombay Government but also the Supreme Government at Calcutta, the Board of Control and the Court of Directors in London—against the lower castes and their hollow claims of “equality before law”, not just in this case but ever since the beginning of the British rule. This paper is based entirely on the records available in the *Maharashtra State Archives*.

Such high sounding claims were periodically made, both in the period preceding this case and after. Even later the Indian Education Commission of 1882 was ambivalent in stating the official educational policy, while declaring that all government aided schools should be open to all castes and communities,⁴ it qualified by exhorting caution that it is not desirable

centuries. Ever since these castes—the untouchables—have been treated with despise by the upper castes, and even their shadow or touch was considered contaminating and polluting.

⁴ “The educational institutional institutions of government are intended by us to be open to all classes and we cannot depart from a principle which is essentially sound and the maintenance of which is of first importance. It is not impossible that in some cases, the enforcement of the principle may be followed by a withdrawal of a portion of the scholars, but it is sufficient to remark that those persons who object to its practical enforcement will be at liberty to withhold their contributions and apply their funds to the formation of schools on different basis.” *MSA/ Report*

to force a social change on an unwilling society. How this discrimination was maintained is shown by Philip Constable in his well-researched paper which deals with a period—the late nineteenth century Western India(1881-1902)— which falls after the case study taken for discussion in this paper.⁵

The facts of the case are like this : On 18th June 1856, Erloo bin Narayan, a resident of Dharwar, which formed a part of the Bombay Presidency and presently is a district of Karnataka State, submitted a petition to Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, through the instrumentality of Mr. Stuart M.I. Gordon, the 1st Assistant Collector and Magistrate at Dharwar, complaining of his having been refused admittance into the Government Marathi School on account of being by birth a Mahar, a social outcaste or untouchable.⁶ He also appended the copies of

of the Indian Education Commission, 1882, pp.515-6.

⁵ Philip Constable, “Sitting on the School verandah : The Ideology and practice of ‘untouchable’ educational protest in late nineteenth-century western India”, *The Economic and Social History Review*, Oct-Dec. 2000, Vol. 37, No.4, 383-422. The emphasis of his paper is on the decades following the **Indian Education Commission** of 1882 and deals with three case studies -1. A dispute between Bombay Church Missionary Society in Manmad and the Manmad local Board school in Nasik (1884-5); 2. the violent attempts of the caste Hindu Patel of Ranjangaon village in Sirur Taluka of Pune district (1880-87); and 3. the untouchable protest to gain access to a government primary school in Dapoli village in Ratnagiri district (1892-1901).; Ellen McDonald’s article similarly deals with the period after the establishment of the University of Bombay and analyzes mainly the curriculum. But she does not make any mention about the socially deprived class— the untouchables. “English Education and Social Reform in Late Nineteenth Century Bombay : A Case Study in the Transmission of a Cultural Ideal”, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No.3, May 1966, pp. 453-70.

⁶ **MSA/ General Department (GD)/ 1856/ Vol.28/ Compilation No. 637.** The actual condition of this petition is very bad as the paper used is very thin and the ink has made impressions on both sides, and that makes it very difficult to read. Philip Constable makes an oblique remark about this case in his article : “In June 1856 another petition was made to the Bombay government by a Christian Mahar convert who had been refused entry to the government school at Dharwar. Missionaries were again seen to be behind the petition. This exclusion occurred in direct contradiction of the Wood Despatch of 1854 which, as a result of increasing missionary pressure over low-caste and untouchable education...” *op.cit.*, p.399. The author does not cite any documentary evidence and wrongly ascribes to the Missionaries the effort to write this petition. In fact, the official records in the Maharashtra State Archives do not make any mention of the Missionaries, not even vaguely, in this entire correspondence.

the correspondence carried with the officials of the Education Department, who had not paid serious attention to his request earlier.

The 'Minute' of C.J. Erskine, the then Director of Public Instruction, on this petition is quite illuminating in showing ambivalent attitude of the officials. Erskine first attempted to find fault in the arguments made by the petitioner. Fully aware that the Education Department's policy was quite contrary, Narayan wishfully had stated that "there would be no objection on the part of the parents to send their children to schools along with him". Erskine questioned the basis of such a statement. Without denying the justness of Narayan's request Erskine's dilemma was, "by what present measures will most good and least harm be done to the cause of Education". He states in the 'Minute' that Mr. Gordon, the 1st Assistant Collector of Dharwar was conveyed with his sympathies and predicament :

I am as anxious as any man can be to contribute to the removal of prejudice which he (Narayan) denounces. But a less propitious moment for attempting to force on the people an agreement which is distasteful to them could hardly be chosen than the present, when we are solicitous to conciliate the wealthier members of all communities and induce them to contribute toward the education of their poorer neighbours, and we have intimated that no new school will be established except with the cooperation of local residents.

The administrative policy Erskine alluded to was that of grant-in-aid under Wood's Despatch of 1854, which announced that to educate the natives would not be the responsibility of the government but that of the people themselves. The Government would only give the native endeavour a partial grant as aid. Hence, Erskine felt that the problem of such an admission would hold back the 'wealthier' upper classes. Shifting the onus of proving the soundness of such a request, Erskine wrote with helplessness and resignation,

"If the writer of this petition be seriously persuaded that the Government system can from this day be worked on the terms which he (Narayan) contemplates, **he would perform a real service if he would attempt to give practical proof of the soundness of his views in the establishment of a partly self-supporting School into which all castes shall be equally admissible.** I do not say that a zealous man might not succeed in effecting this in a particular locality. But I am sure of two things that it would not be expected to succeed generally at once; and that would be a great step towards the annihilation of caste prejudices throughout the Presidency.... decisive measures on this subject can best be adopted after the new system has been allowed to spread in some degree, and not in the very act of appealing for support to the classes whose prejudices it is proposed to

disregard in the outset. I should accordingly prefer that **the question were not pushed to a decision immediately.**”⁷ (Emphasis is mine)

The solution he suggested was to establish a school exclusively for the low-caste boys. Obviously, Erskine’s remarks were guided by the official unwillingness to disregard the caste prejudices of the upper classes and also by abdicating state responsibility to educate the lower classes in favour of the utilitarian concern—the financial support of upper classes for indigenous educational institutions.

Equally ambivalent was the resolution adopted by the Bombay Government (BG) in this case.⁸ At the outset, the resolution acknowledged that, “There can be no doubt that the Mahar petitioner has ‘**abstract justice**’ on his side” and sympathetically hoped for an early removal of prejudices which prevented him from availing the existing means of education. This confession, without spelling-out the nature of that “abstract justice”—something that can only be notional, theoretical and conceptual, and cannot be translated into reality—reflects how the British administrators were trapped in their high sounding ideals and their unwillingness to put into practice those very principles for fear of reaction which could create problems for the continuance of their rule. While repeating the same argument that “to interfere with the prejudices of ages in a summary manner for the sake of one or a few individuals would probably do great damage to the cause of education”, they tried to extricate themselves from the blame of relinquishing moral responsibility by saying that “the disadvantage under which the petitioner labours is not one which has originated with this Government...” and hence refused to act in favour of Narayan. It endorsed the arguments expressed in Erskine’s report and the resolution was conveyed to Mr. Gordon, who had taken much initiative on behalf of Erloo bin Narayan.

The matter did not rest here. The correspondence was forwarded for guidance both to the Government of India (GOI) and Home authorities, namely, the Court of Directors.⁹ Mr. Cecil Beadon, Secretary, Home Dept., GOI, conveyed Governor General’s opinion that ‘probably’ the BG acted wisely in the matter but stated that “the boy would not have been

⁷ C.J. Erskine’s Minute, No. 1652 of 1856, Director of Public Instruction (DPI), Poona (now Pune); **MSA/ GD/1856/ Vol. 28/ 637.**

⁸ Resolution of the DPI, **BG**, dated 10 July 1856. The Governor in Council endorsed the view expressed in the Resolution, vide No.2439, **Ibid.**

⁹ It was informed to the GOI vide, No. 3292, dated 13 November 1856; The dispatch to Court of Directors in London, vide No. 101, dated 2 December 1856; **Ibid.**

refused admission to any Government School in the Presidency of Bengal". He expressed satisfaction that BG had not opened schools exclusively for the low-castes, as suggested by Erskine, for "to adopt it would be to encourage and perpetuate the prejudices which the Government is every where seeking to overcome".¹⁰ The second part of Governor General's observation put the BG in a quandary. It felt offended that the GOI should put them in an odious light—illiberal and exclusivist.

It was immediately resolved that the GOI should be informed that the BG is "most unwilling to neglect any means of rendering the ordinary village schools less exclusive than they practically are in the case of caste, provided this can be reflected without bringing the Government Schools into general disrepute and thus destroying their efficiency." By this time, Erskine was replaced by E.I. Howard as the Director of Public Instruction. Gleaning over the entire correspondence, he concurred with Erskine's report and felt that the GOI had made light of his observations regarding practical difficulties. The 'harm' apprehended, he thought, was "nothing less than the estrangement of wealthier and more influential classes" from the schemes of grant-in-aid and that the declared policy was not to start any new government school or college unless the native community was willing to liberally subscribe half the funds. Further, he remarked perhaps with vague ideas of social change in Bombay Presidency as against Bengal and perhaps acerbically,

In the 3rd Class carriages of every train Brahmins are to be seen in the close contact with Mahars and the other *outcastes* (italics his)... The present generation will surely not scruple to send their children to school with the sons of those with whom they are brought daily in close and immediate bodily contact in the Railway carriage.¹¹

The Governor of Bombay expressed agreement with Howard's views. The GOI was further approached with the purpose of soliciting an opinion on a host of questions: "Whether the admission of such pupil in the Bengal Presidency has met with opposition from natives of caste & if so, whether or not this has been found to affect the usefulness of Government Schools generally, and in what proportion boys of the lower castes are in general or in particular places found to take advantage of the means of education afforded by Government Schools." ¹² It was also asked what kind of

¹⁰ Cecil Beadon, Secretary, Home Department(Ed.), GOI, to W. Hart, Secretary, **GD**, BG, dated 23 January 1857. **MSA/ GD/** Vol. 28/ 283.

¹¹ Minute by E.I. Howard, DPI, 17 February 1857, *Ibid*.

¹² W. Hart to Cecil Beadon, No. 599, 12 March 1857. Page is partially torn here,

response in terms of financial contributions it elicited from the upper and wealthier classes to the schools of mixed castes.

On receipt of this letter, the GOI made express inquiries and forwarded a 'Minute' scripted by the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Mr. Fred Jas Halliday.¹³ The Bengal Government was quick to realize the trap and not only was there complete volte-face from the stand taken in Cecil Beadon's letter, but there was a total surrender to the continuance of a predominantly caste Hindu construction of education and society. Mr. Halliday stated that "the avowed ultimate policy of the Government was that its schools and colleges should be open to every caste, class and creed." But what he stated further in the Minute amounted to not just a virtual surrender but in actuality a justification of the prejudices of the upper castes :

Practically, however, this has never yet been carried into full effect... *the line of tacitly understood exclusion is differently drawn at different times and places, according to the varying tenor of social feelings*; certain castes being admitted in some places, without any offence to Hindu local prejudices, while some castes are excluded, or more properly not encouraged to apply for admission in other places.

This quite and unobtrusive, but in the end, inevitably successful method, applicable indeed to other branches of Administration in India besides that now in question, is, I apprehend, in accordance with the general policy of the GOI, and is, I firmly believe, the best and wisest way of ensuring a safe and steady progress towards civilization and social improvement. A rigid and violent enforcement of philosophical liberality in the management of our Schools, would, I fear, like any over-logical and aggressive reform attempted in other matters, social, political or religious, produce reactions and revulsion, and would thus delay, if not imperil, the ultimate attainment of the great object in view. (Emphasis is mine)

Outraged at the last paragraph of Halliday's Minute, the Secretary Mr. Hart wrote, "I very strongly dissent from the '*modus operandi*' advocated by Hon. Halliday. I consider it virtually amounting to an exclusion (italics his) of boys of the so-called low caste classes. I trust it should not be acted on in this Presidency." In a manner of admonishing Mr. E. I. Howard, he wrote, "*the publication of Mr. Halliday's minute with the approval of this Government will completely prevent justice being obtained by the low*

Ibid.

¹³ J.W. Dalrymple, Under Secretary to GOI to W. Hart, Secretary, GD, BG, dated 5 February 1858. The appended Minute of Mr. Halliday dated 20 May 1857. MSA/GD/ 1858/ Vol.24 / 287.

caste children.” (Emphasis is mine)¹⁴ In the final analysis the British administrative hierarchy refused to act on the plea for liberal education by Erloo bin Narayan.

When referred, the East India Company’s authorities did not specifically comment on this case.¹⁵ But later, they proved to be no less explicit in defining the stand than Mr. Halliday. Lord Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control wrote to the Chairman, Court of Directors,

Education and civilization may descend from the higher to the lower classes, and so communicated may impart new vigour to the community, but they will never ascend from the lower classes to those above them; they can only, if imparted solely to the lower classes, lead to general convulsion, of which foreigners would be the first victim. If we desire to diffuse education, let us endeavour to give it to the higher classes first. (This will help)... unite the higher classes in its support.”¹⁶

Obviously this kind of reaction was not just due to the on-going Revolt of 1857 but one which had been consistently maintained by the British rulers—both in London and India—and which has been described by Nurulla and Naik as the “*downward filtration theory*”¹⁷ dating it to the debate regarding medium of instruction between the Bombay Governor Mountstuart Elphinstone and his Council Member, Francis Warden. Elphinstone saw education as a good opportunity to draw the traditional elites into the British system, for he was deeply worried about the problem of disaffection of the Brahmin class. Although he gave considerable place to English education, he always thought that the vernaculars were of more far-reaching importance as means of instructions for ‘the lower orders’.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ In the Despatch from the Court of Director, Public Department No. 36 of 1857, in the reference made by the Bombay Government vide letter No. 101 of 1856, paragraph No. 6 which referred to Erloo bin Narayan’s petition, nothing was mentioned. **MSA/GD/ Letters from the Court of Directors/ 1857/ Vol. 74.**

¹⁶ In a Memorandum dated 28 March 1858, Sir G.R. Clerk, Secretary of the Indian Board stated similar views. Both these are reproduced in the ***Report of the Director of Public Instructions, Bombay for the year 1857-58.*** pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ S. Nurulla and J.P. Naik, ***A History of Education in India***, Bombay, 1951, pp. 82-83.

¹⁸ For further details, see R.D. Choksey, ***Mountstuart Elphinstone – The Indian Years [1796-1827]***, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1971, pp. 374-5., Kenneth Ballhatchet, ***Social Policy and Social Change in Western India 1817-1830***, OUP, 1957, pp.248-275.

During his period, although education was mostly open to all, partial financial support to Brahmin orthodoxy continued in the form of Daxina fellowship as it was done during the Peshwa period.

It is interesting to recall what Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar,¹⁹ noted social thinker, founder of *Paramhansa Sabha* and Panini of Marathi Grammar, recorded in his autobiography about his recollections on school life which coincides with the post-Elphinstone times. While he was a student in the Native Education Society's Marathi School, an order was issued by the Bombay officials that children belonging to *Shudra* class—Marathas, Kolis, Kulambis, Bhandaris— should be removed from School and nor were they to be admitted in future.²⁰ Children belonging to these castes, who fared well in the studies, had to forgo education. Reverend John Wilson confirms what Dadoba Pandurang has described.²¹ The reason for this action,, writes Dadoba Pandurang, was the caste considerations of Dadaji Dhakjee, a well-known businessman, a senior leader of the Prabhoo caste, and one who was also the member of the Committee for Native Education Society. He threatened that should the lower caste children be admitted to the School, he would ask all children of his caste to withdraw, to which the Parsee, European and other Native members acceded. His obvious consideration was that the education of the low castes would leave few employment opportunities to the upper castes. Dadoba bemoans that though this rule did not last long, the caste prejudices discernibly increased in the later period among the educated classes.²²

This concern is also reflected in a letter that appeared in the *Bombay Gazette* on 23 March 1857 under the title – ***Is Caste to be recognized in the University?*** The question it raised was most poignant:

¹⁹ Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar (1814-1882), was one of the illustrious Tarkhadkar brothers, the others being Bhaskar and Dr. Atmaram. Dadoba was one of the earliest products of English education in Western India. Along with Durgaram Mancharam and Dinmani Shankar, he started Manavdharma Sabha in 1844. He was also the founder of *Paramhansa Sabha*(1848), the first anti-caste association of colonial maharashtra. He advocated “universal humanism”.

²⁰ Anant Kakba Priyolkar (Editor and Biographer), *Raobahaddur Dadoba Pandurang – Purvardh :Autobiography; Uttarardh : Charitra*, Mumbai, 1947, pp.45-47.

²¹ Cited by A.K.Priyolkar in the footnote, *Ibid.*, Wilson wrote in *Evangelization of India*, 1849, p. 338, “The youth of certain castes, however well washed and clothed, dare not enter the Elphinstone Institution. The Vernacular Pantojis drive the children of certain tribes altogether from their schools. None but the Brahmins, ‘the Gods upon earth’, are admissible to the Sanskrit College of Poona.”

²² *Ibid.*

May I start a question which is in my opinion, deserving of the most serious attention of the authorities and of the public at large—viz, “whether young men belonging to the lower caste, such as Pariahs, Mahars, Mangs, Mochees, Sweepers, etc. etc. and converts to Christianity from these castes, shall if qualified, be deemed eligible to admission in the said University ?”.... I can see no reason why the doors of the University...should be closed against this long neglected portion of the subjects of the enlightened Government of Great Britain.²³

The above discussion shows that the British administrators in India sacrificed their noble ideals of “reason and social justice” even before the Revolt of 1857-58. The unwillingness of the British government to do “natural justice” to Erloo bin Narayan and the concerns expressed in the letter in *Bombay Gazette* were, in deed, a continuance of an educational policy which was based on promoting caste distinction. There are instances on record of low-caste children being admitted²⁴, but that was dependent on local reactions similar to those mentioned by the Lt. Governor of Bengal. (Cf. Footnote 12)

The argument of Nurulla and Naik that Wood’s Despatch of 1854 ‘regretted the adoption of *downward filtration theory*’, and that the “Government did not accept, until 1854, any *direct* responsibility for the education of the masses; on the contrary, it decided to *educate a class as a means of ultimately educating the masses*”, is replete with contradictions.²⁵ Neither did the government take responsibility of educating masses before the Wood’s Despatch nor did it do so even after, for the important excuse given in refusing admission in 1856-8 to Erloo bin Narayan was that the

²³ *Bombay Gazette*, 23 March 1857. The letter is sent from Ahmednagar and perhaps could be by somebody who was close to the American Missionaries.

²⁴ *Report of the Government Marathi Schools in the Deccan and Konkan* signed by Capt. Joseph Candy, Supdt. Of Government Marathi Schools, Poona, 27 May 1840, gives caste-wise break-up of students – Brahmins-1848, Shenvi-21, Prabhoo-131, Sonar-132, Wane/Vaishya-194, Gujar-42, Kunbee-335, Koshti-17, Kasar-56, Shimpi-87, Sutar-9, Salee-9, Teli-25, Tamboli-19, Tambat-7, Lohar-11, Dhanger-3, Koli-9, Pardhee-1, Jangam-9, Bhandari-77, Nhavi-7, Marwadi-31, Khatri-2, Mali-2, Kamatee-12, Telangi-2, Parsee-2, Mussalman-80, Isrealite-3, Native Christians-4. Although the number of the lower-classes is fairly small, this list gives no mention of the Mahars, Mangs and other untouchables. *MSA/GD/ Vol. 13/ 530*. The Missionaries admitted these lower castes including the untouchables—Mahars and Dhers— along with higher castes in their educational institutions.

²⁵ Nurulla and Naik, *op.cit.*, pp. 164-5 and 182-83. This work has been held as most authentic by the historians.

upper and wealthier classes would not be forthcoming in supporting educational institutions if he were to be admitted.

However, contrary to Nurulla and Naik's argument, the Wood's Despatch did not put an end to the policy of *downward filtration theory*. This is evident from Erloo bin Narayan's case as well as the assertions of Lord Ellenborough in 1858. (Cf. Footnote 15) The fact that such discriminatory policy continued even after the Crown took over, is evident from the discerning and scathing criticism of the British Government's educational policy in Bombay which comes from the pen of Mahatma Jotirao Phule.

In 1857, the Court of Directors allocated a plot of ground at Poona for erecting a school for the children of Mahars and Mangs in appreciation of Phule's work and that of his colleagues. The 'appreciation', however, was not unqualified: "It seems to us undesirable that the sum contributed towards the School building should be kept on the Government books as an advance for twenty-five years, and as there is no doubt that there will be full and legitimate demands for the appropriation of any surplus of the Duxina Prize funds, we authorize you to adjust the amount as a donation by Government to the purpose of the School."²⁶

In his celebrated work *Gulāmgiri*, Phule accused that "the higher European officers generally view men and things through Brahmin spectacles, and hence the deplorable ignorance they often exhibit in forming a correct estimate of them."²⁷

The Memorial by Phule addressed to the Indian Education Commission under W.W. Hunter, dated 19 October 1882 articulated the deplorable state of affairs caused by the official educational policies and reminded them of the hollowness of their "philosophy more benevolent and utopian" in assertion and "unjust and inequitable" in reality. He stated

My object in writing the present volume is not only to tell my Shudra brethren how they have been duped by the Brahmins, but also to open the eyes of Government to that pernicious system of high class education, which has hitherto been so persistently followed, (and which is)... pernicious to the interest of the Government."²⁸

²⁶ From Court of Directors to Governor in Council, Bombay, No. 7 of 1857, Public Department, in reply to BG letter to the C of D, No. 141, GD[Public], 15 November 1855. **MSA/ GD/ Letters from Court of Directors/ 1857/ Vol. 74.**

²⁷ Dhananjaya Keer, S.G. Malshe (Ed.), ***Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmaya***, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya ani Samskriti Mandal, Mumbai, Third revised edition, 1988, p.83 & 144.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.182-195.

Notwithstanding Phule’s effort to awaken the Government to their lawful responsibilities, the British officials at all levels abdicated their responsibility towards the weaker sections of the society —the lower-castes and the women.

The Case of Erloo bin Narayan, one which was dealt by the entire hierarchy of the British rule, shows that the colonial rulers boasted of principles of ‘justice and equity’ but their recipe was not for India, and that their “utilitarian and political interests” over-ruled all humanitarian considerations. It is important to note that the Revolt of 1857 was not a defining moment for British administrative policy as such discriminatory policies existed even before assurance of non-interference in social matters was given by the Queen’s Proclamation [1858]. The correspondence that follows the case of Erloo bin Narayan exhibits the grim future that education for the lower castes faced in the 19th Century Maharashtra - an indifferent and self-serving British Government on the one side and a hostile Hindu orthodoxy on the other. It took Herculean efforts on the part of Phule and his colleagues to bring about a point of departure in the nineteenth century education scenario. It was only in the twentieth century, when Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar further galvanized the ‘untouchables’ into a political force to reckon with, that education could really reach the grassroots.

NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTS: AMBEDKAR AND SAVARKAR IN AMAR CHITRA KATHA

AJU ARAVIND¹

Amar Chitra Katha presents complex historical facts and intricate mythology in a format that would appeal to children. They not only entertain, but also provide a fitting introduction to the cultural heritage of India. In a country so vast and varied, the series also serves as a medium of national integration, by introducing young readers to the rich cultural diversity of the country and highlighting the achievements of local heroes.
—AAnant Pai, *Rash Behari Bose*, inside cover.

The Amar Chitra Katha Phenomenon

In 1969 Anant Pai, a young Brahmin journalist from Bombay, launched a series of picture-storybooks for children. Titled *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK from now) or Immortal Picture Stories, the series retold Indian myths, history, classics, and legends and folk tales. Pai had to face some disappointment initially since the sales did not pick up. On one occasion he ignored all manner of taboos by putting up a display rack in a restaurant with his own hands -- an amazing action for a white-collar worker and a Kerala Brahmin (Gangadhar 139). There are inspiring accounts of him living on a shoestring budget and peddling his books. But like the heroes in his stories he persevered, bringing out two new issues of ACK every month. By the mid-seventies, ACK had become a household name and was well on its way to making publishing history in India. It was knowledge, history, culture, national pride, recreation-- all in an affordable package. Interestingly, though these books were meant for children, many of Pai's regular readers and most enthusiastic admirers were adults.

¹ Doctoral Student, University of Kottayam.

In February 1967, Pai happened to watch a quiz contest on television while visiting a bookstall in Delhi. Five students of the famed St. Stephen's College participated in the programme but none of them could answer a simple question like who the mother of Rama was. Says Pai:

Ramayana is part of India's heritage. It has given us role models and taught us values of life. So I felt unhappy. I felt more unhappy when these children could answer correctly questions on the gods on Mount Olympus—the Greek gods. That hurt me much more. (Margaret 12)

Pai was more convinced than ever that the younger generation was getting alienated from Indian culture. But when Pai tried to sell his idea of publishing material on “Indian” culture, no publisher was willing to back him. Eventually, when India Book House offered him a small contract, Pai resigned his comfortable job at the *Times of India*, and thus in Mumbai in 1967 ACK began publication. The first in the series of the new publication was *Krishna* published in 1969. It was followed by *Shakuntala*, *The Pandava Princes*, *The Sons of Rama* and *Hanuman*, all of which had mythological themes. *Shivaji*, the first non-mythological, historical narrative brought out in the series, shows an “ideal” masculine figure who fought for the values of the “Hindu” nation and thus serves as pedagogic ideal for the future citizens of India.

Rarely has a connection been made between the extraordinary rise of this genre in the 1970s and the other great events of the decade, and the widely-discussed break-up of the post-Independence consensus of the 1950s and 1960s. Historians and political commentators seem largely agreed that the late sixties and early seventies mark a major turning point in the Indian national life. The exuberance and hope that characterised the Nehruvian era rapidly gave way to disillusionment among various sections of society. The government had not been able to live up to its promises of social or economic justice. The centralised mechanism of planning and the developmental initiatives of the state failed to take into account crucial particularities in the will of the people or the localised, immediate contexts of their lives. The mixed economy model proved inadequate to set the country on the path of redistribution of wealth. By the late sixties economic growth slackened and prices soared. Locally organised resistance and revolts by poor peasants and agricultural labourers, mostly belonging to the lower castes and tribal groups led to movements such as the Naxalbari movement in West Bengal, which subsequently spread to other parts of the country. The government responded with all the might of its repressive mechanism to suppress these movements and finally declared Emergency in 1975.

The present article argues, that developed at a moment when the “Nehruvian” consensus was in crisis, *ACK* articulates the hegemonic ambitions of a modern Hindu nationalism. It has also played a crucial role in moulding the self-images, character and imagination of hordes of middle-class children in the India of the seventies and eighties, who a generation later in the nineties constituted the major portion of the new globalising corporate and professional Indian middle class. Against this backdrop, it is crucial to note that a refined, brahmanised, yet modern, masculinity is represented as a major value in the discourse of *ACK*. It seeks to train future citizens of the nation through narratives that centre and foreground an indomitable and persevering masculinity.

Babasaheb Ambedkar (1979)

The *ACK* series *Babasaheb Ambedkar* can be located at the cutting edge of the cultural politics that marked the 1980s. It is significant to mention that this series was republished in 1996 after the anti-Mandal agitation of the early 1990s and the subsequent resurgence of interest in Ambedkar among dalits and the backward classes. *ACK's Babasaheb Ambedkar* attempts to cut the role of Ambedkar in Modern India to the measures of the nationalist project of modernity and progress.

A study of Ambedkar's politics will reveal to us that he introduced those notes of discordance, both in nationalistic politics and in the constitution of independent India, which challenged the “Hindu” ideal of citizenship and the order of the civil society.

ACK endeavours to shift Ambedkar and his politics onto the terrain of nationalism, modernity, and enlightenment. In fact, by positioning Ambedkar as a pedagogic authority, it seeks to homogenise the claims of the upper caste bourgeoisie that reservation would degrade idealism, hamper the spirit of independence and make the individual “soft.”

The following discussion deals with the narrative maneuvers in *Ambedkar* to translate the “radicality of Ambedkar” into the “radicality” of another kind - more manageable and recognizable within the coercive framework of nationalist elite politics. Read as an allegory of present times, *Ambedkar* upholds merit, reiterates the nation as unitary, and negates the historical differences of caste that might justify the demand for a separate electorate (as in 1932). In other words, the subject of humanism replaces the differential mode in which Ambedkar posited and problematised the dalit subject.

The *ACK Babasaheb Ambedkar* is a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit in the most adverse circumstances. It is an amazing narrative

charting the march of the self on the path of progress and enlightenment, and its attainment of that “neutral” and awesome status of the citizen available only to those who rise above the marks of their oppression, such as caste, community or gender. It would be wrong to say that *Ambedkar* disregards the oppression of the lower castes. In fact, through a series of incidents, the narrative identifies those who perpetuate caste oppression, notifying them as pre-modern and reactionary. Their violence against the lower caste moves the middle class readers to outrage and at each step to distance themselves from it. But at some level, the violence of caste-based oppression depicted in *Ambedkar* makes the readers comfortable and “secular” in the sense that they distance themselves from such practices.

Babasaheb Ambedkar prepares a negotiated terrain where alliances cutting across caste lines are possible (for all those who uphold the universal principle of liberty), and protest can be voiced without damaging the project of modernity.

Ambedkar’s tryst with (Hindu) patriarchy starts even before his birth. In the discourse of *ACK*, the birth of a son (whether it is Shivaji or Jayaprakash) is a significant event heralding great things to come. Thus, almost all *ACK* heroes are born amidst great jubilation, often at an auspicious hour signaling their pre-destined role to wield power and stand apart from the ordinary masses. In the case of Ambedkar, his birth is prefaced by the blessing and prophecy of an ascetic to his father: “I bless you. You shall have a son, who will achieve worldwide fame” (Pai, *Babasaheb* 1).

This is the beginning of a “destinal narrative” of the steady evolution of the self (Kapur 82). This is a birth which is endorsed by the spiritual force of an ascetic, who chooses an exceptional disciple to restore social orders. As Ambedkar’s extraordinary potential is determined, and the readers are moved by the struggles of his childhood and that of his family to educate him, and yet recognise these struggles as “necessary” pre-conditions for him to attain his destined stature. For example, his family has to make extreme sacrifices to get him educated. His mother’s words for instance show the exemplary modernity of his family:

Let’s call him Bhim-- a name befitting one destined to be great. We will give him everything he needs, even if we have to starve. (2)

The family is presented as the source of necessary sacrifice and it strengthens the tradition that inculcates courage and binds one to the logic of the nation. Thus, every great nationalist hero of *ACK* (Shivaji, for example) is fortified by the tale of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in

childhood. It is interesting that Ambedkar, a rallying cry for radical Dalit politics, is fashioned in the same manner:

He [Ambedkar's father] . . . read stories from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayanam* and sang devotional songs to his family. (3)

The point here is not simply to draw a parallel between Ambedkar and Shivaji (or any other hero/ heroine of *ACK*), but to suggest that such a narrative within the framework of *ACK* has a modulating effect on every act of protest by Ambedkar that came afterwards. We remain unshaken in our faith in Ambedkar's allegiance to the foundation of the (uppercaste, Hindu) nation even when he asserts that: "I am born a Hindu. I could not help it. But I solemnly declare that I will not die a Hindu" (Pai, *Babasaheb* 27).

As a child, Ambedkar passively accepts injustice at each act of caste oppression that he suffers. He has to sit separately in the class and cannot drink water from the pot in the school unless someone pours out water for him. He is asked to get down from a bullock cart when the driver comes to know that he is an untouchable. He is stoned by the Brahmins for drawing water from the village well. And so on and so forth. Ambedkar asks his sister:

But why? What makes us different? (Pai, *Babasaheb* 7)

She replies:

I don't know. That's the way it has been always.

Bhim was not satisfied with his sister's answers. (Pai, *Babasaheb* 7)

Every act of injustice accelerates Ambedkar's determined growth and confirms his basic humanity.

Ambedkar "found an oasis of warm affection for him in his Brahman teacher" (Pai, *Babasaheb* 7) who changed the original name from the tongue-twister Ambavdekar to give him his own simpler surname, Ambedkar. In the discourse of *ACK*, this serves a purpose. It is symbolically akin to the sacred thread ceremony of Dayananda where he distributed the sacred thread among the members of the lower-caste in an attempt to prove that Brahmanism is a potentially available category if only one sheds one's ignorance. Ambedkar addresses a group of depressed classes and says:

It is time we root out of our minds the ideas of high and low. We can attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help and regain our self-respect. Liberty is never gifted away, it is fought for. (Pai, *Babasaheb* 20)

The narrative shows how he studied till two in the night in the crowded one room in which his family lived in Bombay, his endless hours of toil at the British Museum library in London, where he would have to save a sandwich from his breakfast for his lunch and so on. Upendra Baxi, in “Emancipation as Justice,” alleges that in accounts of Ambedkar’s life, struggles of the student-scholar have not been highlighted enough in the ACK narrative (140).

The focus of the ACK is such that social inequalities are represented as false consciousness and the onus is on the lower caste to fight a battle within their own selves. Each outward struggle is also presented as an extension of their inner battle rather than as a socially subversive act. Surely there are external factors and antagonists -- the priestly classes, caste prejudices, and superstitions. Yet, the major site of strike is within the individual.

In an incident where Ambedkar leads a crowd of the “depressed classes” to the municipal tank of Mahad, which has been legally open for four years and has never been used by the people of the lower castes, the crowd follows Ambedkar hesitantly (“Draw water from the tank? Do we dare to do it?” (Pai, *Babasaheb* 21)). By one act of courage, drinking water from the tank with his cupped hands Ambedkar makes a “miracle” happen:

This gesture had a remarkable effect. Ambedkar had exorcised fear from the mind of his people. Thousands drank water from the public tanks and made history. (Pai, *Babasaheb* 21)

The incident highlights not only a remarkable victory of the individual self but also poses an interesting opposition between civil societal equality (the public tank being open to all) and vestiges of the primitive that taint the society. Incensed at being stoned by upper-caste Hindus for drinking water from the public tanks, Ambedkar’s followers say to him:

Give us word, Sir, and we shall finish them (Pai, *Babasaheb* 22).

Ambedkar replies:

No violence will help. We’ll do nothing unlawful. I have given my word that we will agitate peacefully. (22)

The narrative further informs us that Ambedkar had promised the police that he would keep his people under control and thus “he prevented a bloodbath” (Pai, *Babasaheb* 22).

However, *ACK* remains silent on Ambedkar's hostile attitude towards Gandhi and his Harijan Sevak Sangh, which according to Ambedkar "kill[s] the spirit of independence among the untouchables" (Ambedkar 267) and also on his stance at the Round Table Conferences, where he anxiously and repetitively presses the point that the depressed classes do not demand the immediate transfer of political power from Britain to the Indian people (Srivatsan 19).

In *Babasaheb Ambedkar* the narrative presents the voicing of those separate grievances as a clause or a suffix to the nationalist demand for freedom:

The Depressed classes of India also join in the demand for replacement of the British government by a government of the people for the people. . . our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been rightened although 150 years of British rule have rolled away. What good is such a government to anybody. (Pai, *Babasaheb* 24)

Also significant is Gandhi's stamp of approval:

From the reports that have reached me of your speeches at the First Round Table Conferences, I know you are a patriot of sterling worth. (Pai, *Babasaheb* 24)

In a way, it is through the establishment of Ambedkar's patriotic credentials that the narrative prepares us for his demand for a separate electorate. When the reader finally encounters this demand, its oppositional force is subordinate to the unquestionable patriotism of Ambedkar. *ACK* on Ambedkar, however, remains silent on his extremely critical stands on Gandhi in this issue, his methods of spiritual coercion, and how Gandhi fasted to make Ambedkar withdraw his demands.

Ambedkar of *ACK* emerges as the nationalist leader, the individualist par excellence. As his unique and unyielding selfhood is magnified, there is simultaneous reinforcement of the category of citizenship to the exclusion of all other categories (caste, community or gender). The struggles of Ambedkar's life are also represented as the battle for the modern nation which can be only be "corrupted" by caste-- whether it is articulated as discrimination or as demand. The words of Ambedkar as he presented the draft of the constitution to the constituent assembly, chosen to be quoted in *ACK*, efface that other domain of politics which made the idea of nation much less final and more fraught for him:

. . . and I appeal to all Indians to be a nation by discarding castes which have brought about separation in social life and created jealousy and hatred. (30).

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

ACK release titled *Veer Savarkar: In the Andamans* provides a perplexing history of a nationalist hero, Savarkar-- the author of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923)—a basic text for nationalist “Hinduness.” This text consisted of an appeal to consolidate Hindutva in the face of pan-isms such as Pan-Islamism. For Savarkar, the territory of India could not be alienated from Hindu culture and Hindu people. He charged the national space with the ethical nuance of Holy Land:

The Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of the love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers. (qtd. in Jaffrelot 28)

Christians and Muslims were not part of the nation for they did not look upon India as their Holy Land.

A crucial marker of Savarkar’s discourse was the image of the perpetually lustful Muslim male who posed a serious threat to the honour of the Hindu woman and consequently to the honour of the Hindu community, Tanika Sarkar says:

From Savarkar’s formative writings on Muslim rule in India, the stereotype of an eternally lustful Muslim male with evil designs on Hindu women has been reiterated and made a part of a historical commonsense. (185)

The ACK series begins with Savarkar’s life in London. As a young anti-colonial revolutionary, Savarkar was arrested in England and imprisoned in the Andamans for eleven years, before going on to become a leader of the Hindu right. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the Hindu militant organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh popularly known as RSS (National Association of Volunteers) was heavily influenced by Savarkar. The RSS aspired to become the torchbearer of martial, organised and rational Hinduism, denuded of its pagan rituals and forms of folk worship. Ashis Nandy and others regard this as an attempt to marginalise the little cultures of Hinduism, which were non-masculine and non-brahmanic (65).

Although in his earlier days Savarkar had been associated with socialist and antipartition activists, after his imprisonment Savarkar increasingly saw communalist Muslim organisations as the “enemy,” and his work with the Mahasabha earned him a position as an increasingly right-wing, anti-Gandhian, and anti-Congress leader. He became a vocal proponent of a Hindu-centric state, and supported militaristic defense of “Hindu” interests in response to his perception of an increased threat from Muslims. His vehement anti-Gandhian speeches, deriding Gandhi as anti-national and anti-Hindu, were a source of inspiration to the RSS, Nathuram Godse and the group of young militants who orchestrated Gandhi’s assassination.

All this, however, is not apparent in the *ACK* version of his life. The introduction to this series tells the readers that the text of this *ACK* has been drawn largely from Savarkar’s autobiography *My Transportation for Life*. In keeping with the issue’s subtitle, the volume devotes most of its panels to Savarkar’s imprisonment in the cellular jail in the Andamans. The first few pages set Savarkar up as a strident young revolutionary, documenting his work in acquiring arms and training others in their use.

The very first page shows Savarkar giving his associate a handgun that is concealed in a book (Figure 1). narrative and visual representations, the Chitrakatha is itself quite original and without precedent. As a cultural project, *ACK*’s ambition was the rewriting of Nehruvian India. It has not only shaped dominant contemporary ideas about Indian history and tradition, brahminism and masculinity but also made a critical contribution in moulding many other present-day hegemonic articulations about merit, self-respect, self-improvement, hard work and so on.

These *ACK*s resonate with many of the central ideological themes of *ACK* - individuality, masculinity, merit, national culture, global identity and so on. During the late sixties, Anant Pai created *ACK* to configure a fresh national modernity that would establish and authorise its connection with the “unbroken heritage” of India. Such modernity, he thought, would prepare middle-class youth to take on their central role in the nation. It is argued here that Nehruvian socialism and the developmental state are a kind of hidden counterpoint to the narratives of *ACK*.

ACK manages to establish a firmer connection between the figure of Nehru, Savarkar and Ambedkar and the making of a global identity in the contemporary right-wing context, subtly. The series bills itself as representing “the glorious heritage of India,” an India that is carefully constructed so that instances of Hindu fundamentalism are diligently avoided. It’s easy to find a shared context between the cultural-intellectual framework of *ACK* and the Pan-Hindu Fundamentalist Organisation

Vishwa Hindu Parishad. *ACK* was launched a few years after the birth of the VHP and it responded to a cultural need sharply felt in the rank and file of the VHP. In the 1960s and 1970s, the VHP did not display the militant traits that have come to be associated with it since the 1980s as held by Manjari Katju in *The Early Vishwa Hindu Parishad: 1964 to 1983*. The stress was more on the idiom of reform and reconciliation rather than on militancy and aggression. The leadership of the VHP in its early days consisted of members of the intelligentsia, the proprietary classes, petty-bourgeoisie and the sacred-religious strata. The VHP was brought into existence by these conservative sections, discontented as they were with the mildest transformation of the country's economy and social structure along the lines of a socialist vision. While the VHP was concerned with defending, protecting and preserving Hindu society from the "insidiously spreading clutches of alien ideologies," the context of modern times was not absent from its thoughts (qtd. in Katju 37).

The *ACK* narrative carefully maps out a ground on which the ideologies of the secularists and the Vedantic spiritualism of Hindu nationalists meet without conflict. It is significant that leaders like L. K. Advani who publicly announced that he was irreligious and never went to temples spearheaded the Ramjanmabhumi movement of the 1990s. As indicated earlier, Rama, in the context of Hindu nationalism, becomes the symbol of the truly tolerant and secular nation. In an interview with Anant Pai, Deepa Sreenivas notes that Pai never went to a temple to take care of his wife's sandals (which she would have to leave outside). He added:

But then I don't mind anybody going to the temple. I want the freedom of thought and expression. Whereas [among] Muslims, it is considered his duty to kill a person who believes in idolatry. [There is] no other religion which enjoins upon you to war and to kill. So you see in the 21st century . . . because education will not make a difference to this thing [sic]. What Ashok Singhal [and other leaders of VHP] is doing is a reaction to this kind of fanaticism. (Sreenivas 217)

However, Pai is also quick to distance himself from Singhal in a mode that reveals to us his affinity with a secularism that is akin to Nehru's:

So far as I am concerned, I think it is not my job to create barrier between one man and another; one child and another. I try all my best to see that. . . suppose, even Akbar for example, he mercilessly beheads Hemu and hangs the head [in the battlefield] even then I don't want to go against history, at the same time, I tone down that. I don't show the picture of that head [sic]. (Sreenivas 218)

In both cases the emphasis is on a superior masculinity that is to be cultivated through the development of a healthy body and sound mind. This masculinity, in the context of India, would have to be defined in opposition to lower-caste masculinity and Muslim masculinity. In a way, the character-forming role that sport and physical exercise played in British public schools is replicated in the schools (of the RSS).

ACK adopt the process of strategic abridgment and inclusion repeatedly, to construct a larger ideological notion of the nation so as to construct an ideological order that tries to legitimise the norms and manners of the dominant group and exclude the subaltern and thus maintain the status quo. The revolutionary strength of the subaltern usually goes unnoticed in comics and animated cartoons, as they rely on visually codified representations which, in “cultural terms, taps into moral and political rationales” through which the producers and transmitters of the text (who also own and control the means of production) propagate the ideologies of the dominant group (Gabilliet 203). They articulate or rather justify the position of the dominant group on subjects like nation and race by reducing real people, here the subaltern, to abstractions.

It may look comical in retrospect but most middleclass teenagers in India could read the books of James Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins only on the sly as their parents thought that those books would “corrupt” children at an “impressionable” age. But ironically, when we closely examine the dynamics of texts like *ACK*, designed specially for children, we perceive how ideologically charged its “innocence” is.

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ARTICULATING CASTE AND MODERNITY: LOCATING PHULE’S DISCOURSE

MERIN SIMI RAJ¹

“A visionary sometimes arrives ahead of his time, and finds himself unable to mobilize a sufficient social force to ensure the perpetuation of his ideas in thought and action. Phule’s history is clearly of this category”
(Muralidharan 17).

Jotirao Phule is considered as the first generation Renaissance thinker of India. (Omvedt 1). Being a reformer and a revolutionary, who was driven by passionate humanitarianism, he earned the title ‘Mahatma’ from his followers and contemporaries. It is indeed a different question whether he has been accorded his due in Indian socio-political history. Nevertheless, the foundation that he had laid for social revolution provided the momentum for taking the social revolution to the political realm, though after a few decades. Unlike many other contemporary reform leaders, Phule’s conception of ‘reform’ and ‘progress’ began from within the family structure itself by addressing the gender question and went on to address larger questions pertaining to casteism and related oppressive tactics. Omvedt describes Phule as one of the few social reformers who ‘deserve the respect of women’, and also as the ‘first systematic theorist of caste’.

Though Phule had initiated radical thoughts and actions way back in the nineteenth century, socio-political history had pushed Phule’s contributions into the peripheries and he “had to wait for his first sophisticated historical study till Gail Omvedt’s book (*Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873-1930*) in 1976” (Sarkar 39). Phule was an advocate of the untouchables, peasants and widows and promoted women’s education and liberation on a massive scale. His praxis matched his theory as his own wife Savitri Bai

¹ Doctoral Student, Dept of Humanities, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai.

was also working in the girls' schools that he had started in 1848 (for untouchables) and in 1851 (for all castes). The emancipatory activities like widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage, promotion of education etc were extended to women from upper castes as well. He had thrown open the drinking water tank in his house to untouchables in 1868. In the introduction to *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, G.P. Deshpande vouches, "No high caste or bhadralok reformer had ever done such a thing" (Deshpande 3). Phule was the fore-runner of many revolutionary and radical socio-political thoughts and praxis. Phule's *Gulamgiri* was published in 1873, two years prior to Dayanand Saraswati's *Satyarth Prakash*. Phule also founded the Satya Shodak Samaj / Society of Truth Seekers in 1867, four years prior to Arya Samaj. However, Indian history records Dayanand Saraswati's contributions in bold letters but Phule has been dismissed to the fringes of socio-political history.

1. Phule's *Gulamgiri*

Gulamgiri (translated as *Slavery*), the best known of Phule's works, was published on 1 June 1873. In this treatise he equates casteism to slavery and unleashes a scathing attack on Brahminism and its upholders. He also deconstructs the Vedas and rips them apart by exposing the 'conspiracy' of Brahminical ideology. Phule had definite problems in accepting the Vedas as the foundation of Indian civilization and tradition as the majority of the native population did not have even access to the ancient scriptures. Phule's theoretical deliberations resulted in the formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj in the same year. *Gulamgiri* can be regarded as the manifesto of Satyashodhak Samaj. The Samaj aimed for a casteless society build on egalitarian foundations rather than abstract, infallible centres of power which operated with divine sanctions. Phule hoped that through organized, collective action the inhuman practices which sprung from casteist divisions could be eliminated from society. Satyashodhak Samaj also lacked centralized organizational form and focused more on individual propagandizing efforts. There was no overall controlling body and that led to its poor sustenance. The Samaj was founded on Phule's insatiable passion for rational egalitarianism but that was not enough to bind the followers together for long.

Omvedt points out that Phule's writings were intended to shock people into awareness rather than to provide an extensive analysis. "They are unsystematic, sporadic, pictorial rather than discursive, hard-hitting ..." (Omvedt 21). The title of *Gulamgiri* may raise many an eyebrow even today. *Slavery: (In This Civilised British Government under the Cloak of*

Brahminism) Exposed by Jotirao Govidraw Fule. The work is originally in Marathi but the preface is in English written by Phule himself, perhaps, with the intention of communicating directly with the colonial rulers, as the preface by and large addresses the British government. The treatise is “Dedicated to the good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their ... devotion in the cause of Negro slavery”. The work is written in the form of a dialogue between Dhondiba and Jotirao. It is divided into sixteen sections and deals with a variety of issues ranging from critiques on the origin of Brahma to an analysis of the efficacy of the government system and officials. Most of his views and observations on the sanctity of religious texts are radical and revolutionary to the core and were often interpreted as blasphemy. Jotirao tells Dhondiba, “My dear, try reading the Bhagawata once. I assure you, you will prefer Aesop’s Fables!” (63), to which Dhondiba replies later, “At least they do not contain anything which would corrupt the minds of young children” (73).

The first nine sections try to re-read the scriptures and challenge its infallibility. He deconstructs the divine origin theory and even goes to the extent of making a mockery out of it. “... the account of human beings given by Manu is completely wrong, simply because it cannot be applied to all human beings” (48). His observations are rooted in rationality and he develops his polemic in the most logical sense. He explains how the Brahminical ideology had seeped into the minds of the people through scheming conspiracies and apparently innocent coincidences. He talks about the distortion of history and the ‘great mischief played by a few Brahmin authors’ (73) in constructing a dominant ideology favourable to them – “some cunning brahmans must have interpolated this fishy myth into the ancient treatise” (51). Phule employs a historical materialist analysis and explains in simple terms how Buddhism was won over by the Brahmins through the scrupulous, cunning devices of Shankaracharya (74-75).

If one reads this from the framework of a postcolonial theory that identifies two main players, the colonizing power British and the native one would not fail to detect a pro-British stance that underlies throughout the entire treatise. However, this can be justified as Phule saw the British as emancipators as against the upper castes who have been trampling the lowercastes under their foot for centuries. In the preface Phule says, “Happily for our Shudra brethren of the present day our enlightened British Rulers have not recognized these preposterous, inhuman and unjust penal enactments of the Brahmin legislators. They no doubt regard them more as ridiculous fooleries than as equitable laws” (29). He ends the preface with an assurance, “if the hearts and minds of the Sudras are made

happy and contented the British government need have no fear for their loyalty in future” (35). In the introduction he makes an overt statement, “And then, as luck would have it God took pity on them and British rule was established in India. The shudras heartily thank the British for this and are exceedingly grateful on them” (44). Later he appeals to the British throne directly. “... the Queen, who alone can remove the bond of slavery tied around their (the shudras) necks by the wily brahmans” (87).

These statements were later used against Phule and his followers as ‘evidence’ of his pro-British feelings. It should be noted that the untouchables got recognition as human beings and got an opportunity to seek employment out of their traditional ‘polluting’ jobs. Hence, Phule cannot be blamed for seeking solace under the British rule which was far more emancipatory in terms of education and occupational mobility than ‘home rule’. His appeal to the British – to the outsider – made sense as there was no hope of finding an ally from within. Besides, Phule’s personal experiences of discrimination had convinced him that the need to cleanse the minds of his fellow men and women of the outdated belief system that propagated inequality and injustice was far more important than nourishing anti-British feelings. Phule was driven with the conviction that the British rule would unleash the forces of enlightenment to root out Brahminical religion that legitimized evil customs and practices. Gavaskar gives a more pragmatic reason for Phule’s stance. “Given the powerless site from which Phule was articulating his radical critique of inegalitarian society, it was inescapable for him to side with one of the two power centres – the British or the burgeoning nationalist assertion of Brahmins – to render his reality meaningful” (Gavaskar, 95). At the same time Phule strategically places his critiques against the British rule as well. “... we are extremely sad to note that the benevolent British government has ignored the problem of education of the shudras” (45).

Colonial Rule vs. Brahminical Rule

Phule believed that Brahminical rule is worse than colonial rule. He sees the brahminical hegemony and ‘their harassing of the shudras and atishudras as worse than that of the Americans torturing their slaves’ (98). Compared to the centuries old yoke thrust upon the shudras by the upper castes, the colonial rule is negligible and does not come across as any more threatening than Brahminical rule.

“Almost all government departments are so crowded with *bhats* who oppress the shudras so much that the stories of their black deeds will certainly put the oppressive British indigo plantation owners in Calcutta to

shame” (67). Here Phule is referring to the introduction of Indigo Plantations in Bengal during the 1850s. The cultivators had rebelled against the British and this had resulted in quite a furore throughout the country. The Brahma Samaj had extended legal and organizational support for the indigo workers during that period. However, the same Samaj was quite indifferent to the caste question and its inequalities and this had irked Phule. The point here is not to undermine the efforts of the Brahma Samaj but to point out its peripheral nature in addressing social issues. While a revolt against the colonial state gained national status and support the revolt against the centuries’ long suppression was dismissed as being casteist and communal.

From section ten onwards Phule tries to expose the Brahminical hegemony even in the modern systems of governance. “... have acquired various jobs as clerks etc. in government offices and infested the places so thickly that it is impossible to find any office, either government or otherwise, without a brahman in it”. (75). Phule is extremely critical and skeptical of the social reformist movements under Brahmin leadership. “Their grandiosely named organizations should not just point out to the shudras the tiny mistakes of the government and instigate them against the British. What they should do instead is to realize and remove their own faults” (79). In section 12 Phule points out that since all the higher level administrative posts are held by the Brahmins the lower castes find it highly impossible to access them or to approach them for the alleviation of their grievances.

Though occupational mobility was not popular, caste was not an issue at all when it came to the recruitments for British army. “Why, the army recruits people from all castes; that doesn’t lead people to create mayhem in India?” (96-97). Phule feels that caste is blown out of proportion only when Brahmins are kept in charge of the government, official duties. Army recruitment process is done directly by the government without any Brahmin intermediaries, hence, no bias. The other reason could be that entry into Army does not bring about any structural change in the society in terms of power or hierarchy.

The non-Aryan theory of caste

In *Gulamgiri* Phule fired his first shots against the theory of Aryan civilization and their superiority. He challenged the prevalent belief that the Aryans were the original settlers of the subcontinent. “The rowdy ancestors of these ruffian brahmans came to our country from outside, defeated our ancestors and turned them to slaves” (76). It is quite obvious

that he had the Brahmins in mind when he used the word Aryan. At the outset of his treatise he attacks the Aryans/brahmans, “The Aryans ... appear to have been a race imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning and arrogant and bigoted” (78). Phule re-interprets the scriptures by reading the nine avatars of Vishnu as different stages of Aryan conquest. (80-83. He projects King Bali, a non-Aryan king, as a counter-symbol of power against the Brahmins. (85).

The Aryan theory of race was a product of the Western thought as it was developed and popularized by the German philologists especially Max Muller (1823-1900) during the 1840s and 1850s. Muller had traced a common ancestry for the Indians and Europeans. Hence, many upper castes believed that there were blood ties between the British and the caste Hindus who descended from the common Aryan ancestor! During Phule’s time the Orientalists like William Jones (1746-1794) and Sir Charles Wilkins (1749-1836) were using the Aryan theory of race to assert an ethnic kinship between Europeans and ancient Vedic people. They asserted that Aryans were the original inhabitants of the subcontinent and Indian civilization can be seen as primarily derived from Aryan civilization. The constant interest of European scholars in ancient Aryan society and their praises of this society was an important moral boost to high caste Indians. Through this the caste system was subtly lauded as a means by which people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds were brought together and subjected to the civilizing influence of the Aryans (Michael 2006).

Views on patriotism

Phule had a very sarcastic attitude towards the romanticized notions of ‘patriotism’ promoted by the nationalists. He saw the attempts to ‘nationalise’ and ‘homogenise’ as deliberate efforts to divert the attention of the shudras and the downtrodden from the real, compelling issues of oppression and inequality. He was critical about the kind of minimal education imparted to the shudra children. “Therefore, instead of teaching the shudras some basic practical knowledge, they fill up their minds with a lot of rubbish about the fake principles of patriotism and turn them into devotees of the English state” (67). At another instance, in section XIV he elaborates this discussion and ridicules the upper castes for their double standards.

... one should not really be surprised at their distorting the meaning of the word patriotism because even their ancestors were unable to understand the true meaning of the term. ... Had their ancestors known what

patriotism really meant, they would never have described the shudras as inferior to even beasts in their books. ... The ancestors of these so-called enlightened brahmans are supposed to have presented patriotism that is superior to that of the Greeks! ... What fool would accept their advice to drive the English, who have rescued us from the slavery of bhats, away from our land? (88-89).

Phule also exposes the ambivalence of the Sepoy Mutiny and its nationalistic nature. While the revolt was against the 'loss of caste', what implication would it have on those who did not have a caste at all? However, even those who were outside the caste Hindu fold were forced to be a part of the struggle though they did not share the common consciousness. Phule did not consider the 1857 revolt as a nationalist revolt or war for independence. In fact, he refers to the revolt as the "*bhat* rebellion" (94) in which the shudras had no part to play. He also makes a telling observation that "it would be very difficult to find a single rebellion against the British which did not have a brahman priest in the leading position, instigating it either openly or secretly. ... who were the people in the so-called chapati rebellion of 1857? None other than the deshastha brahmans from the north like Bhatpande, the konkastha brahman Nana, Tatyapa Topya such others" (76).

Phule did get support from the upper caste Brahmins when he started the girls' school and the school for atishudras. However, voices of dissent emerged when those shudra children were taught 'more' than basic literary skills. It was then that Phule decided to part ways from his upper caste friends and continue working on his own with the help of some sympathetic British supporters. Along with that Phule distanced himself from the other "nationalist" projects as well as there was no common consciousness to bind the two historically dichotomous groups together. To Jotiba's complaint, "... in 1857 the *bhat* rebellion broke out. After than I began to sense that the European officers were giving me the cold shoulder; they did not speak to me as genially as they used to to, ..." Dhondiba replies, "Why, just because of the arrogance of the bhats they began to frown at you. That means they chose to ignore and reject the innocent and side with the guilty!" (94-95). Here it clearly indicates that Phule and his associates had no intentions of battling against the British; in fact they were strongly against it. Phule maintained that the upper castes did not want the shudras to get closer to the British. He admits that for a while he too was fascinated by the ideals of patriotism and had romantic notions of bringing about unity by reforming the religious tenets and going back to the Vedas. Phule says, "They are afraid that if we, shudras, really become the brothers of the enligsh, we will condemn their wily religious

books and then these bhats who are so proud of their caste will have to eat dust; ... not even the father of their god brahma will be able to claim that the *bhat* is superior to the shudra” (88).

There was definite unrest within the ‘nation’ against the nationalist projects and struggles undertaken by the ‘leaders’. But those were unheard voices, which had no forum to protest, no legitimacy to convince and no power to influence. At one instance, though indirectly, Phule attacks the upper castes’ ambivalent position on social reforms. They consider themselves much higher in status than the shudras and boast of their rich tradition and prestigious status. But Phule feels that they are not even capable of preventing the evils that prevail within their own community. “... the bhats always blow their own trumpet. What is the point in taking such people as partners in such work when they can’t snatch away the razors from the hands of the barbers who shave their young, widowed sisters?” (90). In fact, Phule had done more for the rehabilitation of the Brahmin widows than what his upper caste counterparts had done. Phule extensively talks about widow remarriage (for all castes) and is against the seclusion of the widows. However, our history telling was so partial and blinded that widow remarriage has become synonymous to Rammohan Roy as he was endorsed by the national party.

Phule vehemently criticizes the double standards of the so-called national leaders. He feels that the leaders protest against the colonial rule and at the same time try to appease the British rulers. “One day they wax eloquent on the occasion of the Queen’s birthday at a public meeting in order to carry favours from the British and the very next day, they display exactly the opposite behaviour in newspapers or in their personal talk” (60). Though Phule saw the British as ‘emancipators’ and ‘saviours’, he was not a naïve supporter of whatever the British did. It is recorded that in 1880 he was the only member of the Poona Municipality who opposed the spending of Rs.1,000 for the Viceroy’s visit. (quoted by Omvedt 25). His extension of support to the British was perhaps a political choice made out of the compulsion of circumstances.

Call to Action

Gulamgiri concludes with a powerful call to action against the uppercastes and does not suggest joining hands with the freedom struggle. In section XIV he justifies his stance. “... the English are here today, but who knows whether they will be here tomorrow? They won’t be here till eternity. Therefore, all the shudras should make haste to free themselves from the ancestral slavery of these *bhats*” (89).

Jotirao convinces Dhondiba and manages to plant the seeds of revolution in him. “Why don’t you denounce their crafty religion and undertake the task of awakening our ignorant brothers?”, asks Dhondiba. Jotirao prepares an open letter to be published in all the newspapers with the title “How the Shudras can emancipate themselves from the slavery of the Brahma rakshasa”. The letter appeals to the shudra brethren to join hands in the efforts to emancipate them from the ‘slavery of the bhats’. Phule is neither too ambitious nor blindly optimistic about the imminent changes in the socio-political fabric. He admits that it is a rather long process which is not going to be easy by any means. “Of course, I am aware that it is an uphill task. Even the Americans, who are far more advanced compared to other people, had a tough time rescuing their slaves from the clutches of their own brothers” (96).

2. Phule’s *Shetkaryacha Asud*

Shetkaryacha Asud (translated as Cultivator’s Whiplash) was written in 1883 but the publication was delayed as Phule himself said, ‘we the shudras have amongst us cowardly publishers’. The work is divided into five chapters followed by two appendices. In *Shetkaryacha Asud* Phule addresses the problems of the farmers and peasants and goes on to analyse them against the historical dominance of the Brahmins.

Addressing the notion of national unity

In chapter V, Phule lists a series of atrocities committed by the Brahmins, details out the rigid exclusion that they have been practicing for centuries and repeatedly asks, “so, how will the farmers and brahmans unite?” (176-178). Phule does not see any sympathetic gestures from the brahmans’ side towards the peasants; instead he sees the gap widening. Injustice is meted out to the farmers from all quarters. The farmers’ access to the systems of governance is incidentally through the Brahmins who are heading the various sectors under the British government. Even for minor things the farmers face insult and injury in getting their grievances solved. “...when water is not available from them, if they go to their superior officers for justice, instead of water a stream of rude language ensues” (152). How can one expect a farmer to join hands with the same brahmans for a political cause which is not even his immediate reality?

In the nationalist scenario fervent attempts were being made to homogenize culture through the ‘common’ framework of Hinduism. Most of the social movements addressed the masses through religious

reformation, by claiming to revive Hinduism to its ancient glory and restore the egalitarian past that it supposedly had. Phule subverts the notion of religious reformation altogether and plainly states that “if the learned Arya bhat brahmans really wish to unite the people of this country and take the nation ahead, then first they must first drown their cruel religion ... must cease using any artifice in their relationship with the shudras, who have been demeaned by that religion and trample on inequality and the Vedanta opinion, and till a true unity is established, there will be no progress in this country” (178). He is not fascinated by the temporary relationships that are established in the name of reform movement or freedom struggle. He says, ‘that improvement will not last for long’ (178). According to Phule, a few brahmans accepting the shudras into their fold or a few shudras joining the nationalists will not make any dramatic difference in the social structure or the psyche of the people. Unity will remain a distant dream if it is not initiated and supplemented with equality. Phule’s concerns are not with individuals but with communities and groups which shape and condition the individual’s psyche.

Critiques on Reform Movements

Phule criticizes the Hindu reform movements subtly and at times explicitly as well. In the appendix to *Shetkaryacha Asud* Phule addresses the fallacy of treating Sanskrit as the divine language. He argues that “Vedas were not written for the upliftment of all mankind because most of the people of the world do not at all speak or know Sanskrit. How can a scripture which people don’t understand liberate them?” (187). This was written during the time when Sanskrit was projected by the nationalists and reformers as the language of Indian tradition and culture.

In the first chapter he makes a passing statement that ‘several wily brahmans are protecting the silly Hindu dharma’ (130) which obviously refers to the Arya Samaj and the associates. During the time of Phule, Arya Samaj was flourishing well in Calcutta and had formed a sister organization in Bombay named Prarthana Samaj. Their aim was to revive interest in Vedas and Phule had found this quite disturbing as it meant the reiteration of the age-old myths which acknowledged and reinforced the hegemonic hierarchy of caste. Though the nationalist / reform movements spoke social uplift with vigour and enthusiasm, they practiced discrimination even in education given to the shudra children. The learning given to them is deliberately designed to remind them of their lower status and condition them in such a way that they remain in the

outskirts of mainstream social life throughout. “The Arya bhats and brahmins do not admit shudra farmers’ children in their Sanskrit schools but in their Prakrit Marathi schools ... and teach them only the basic letters, arithmetic and modi, some shloka in Prakrit relating to pretentious and false Puranas, and a few songs, or teach them lavanis, Never giving them sufficient knowledge to even to keep accounts of expenses at home. So how would they enter into the mamledar’s offices and become even clerks?” (122). This ‘second-class citizen’ treatment was with the knowledge and silent consent of the government. Hence, the lower castes could never see anything unpatriotic in not identifying themselves with the nationalist movement. Congress appropriated the benefits of colonial rule and attributed it to the Hindu reform movements and nationalist political movement. But, the ‘proper’ education which the lower castes including Phule received was from the church-based schools and the Anglo-Indian schools opened by the colonial rulers and not initiated or supported by the Congress or any of its associate reform movements. (Ilaiah 123-4).

3. Satsar (The Essence of Truth)

The criticism is more direct and poignant in Satsar (translated as The Essence of Truth) where he takes the names of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Prarthana Samaj. Satsar (1885) is a booklet published by Phule in ‘public interest’. Interestingly it was in the same year that the INC was formed as a political organization. The first section of Satsar (Number 1) is in the form of a dialogue between a Brahman and a shudra whose names are not given. The shudra is member of the Satyashodhak Samaj and is engaging in a debate with the brahman, a member of Brahma Samaj, regarding the conversion issue of Pandita Ramabai². The second section is a conversation between Kondaji Patil and Tatya – both members of Satyashodhak Samaj. The final section is between Phule and Yashwant.

At the outset itself Brahma Samaj is accused of being casteist as ‘it wishes to convert the mahars and mangs to brahmaism’ (207). The shudra rejects the ‘benevolence’ of the brahmins and says, “we do not want anything to do with your Prarthana Samaj, Brahma Samaj and the like” (207). The use of ‘your’ is not accidental but deliberate and indicates that the Other had already formed in the shudra consciousness. The Brahman tries to argue that the Brahma Samaj was responsible for religious reforms

² Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922): a Brahmin woman who converted to Christianity despite the protests and threats from orthodox Hindus. She initiated reform movements for women. Wrote a book titled *The High Caste Indian Women*.

and had initiated women's education. But the shudra refutes these claims and attributes all the progressive moves to the 'efficacy of the English rule' and asks the Brahman to 'stop boasting about your Brahma Samaj' (209). During that period all the progressive reform movements were attributed to the Brahma Samaj by "nationalist" leaders. Phule was also working towards female education, widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage etc. Nevertheless his efforts were not appreciated; not only that, his plays and writings were rejected by the Dakshina Prize Committee as his activism did not confine to the standards of traditional Hindu society.

There were educated shudras who could understand the lop-sided stance of these elite reform movements. But they hardly ever critiqued the reform movements or the leaders openly. In Satsar Phule expresses his discontent over this silence as well, though in a mild fashion. He says, "... even the scholars among the shudras never utter a word against the deceitful mischief created by the brahmans in their big Samaj" (212). During that time there must have been educated progressive shudras who joined hands with the Samaj by accepting and supporting the brahminical efforts to Sanskritize and revive the Vedas.

Phule exposes the paradoxical nature of the elite Samajs which project themselves as representatives of Indian modernity. "The founders of that Samaj were the cunning Aryas who were staunch idolators and such believers in the pride of their caste that they would not touch an English book when they had bathed and purified themselves. ... in order to preserve the menace of their dharma they have included a rule in their statutes that no body should talk about dharma" (212). Here Phule is ridiculing the ideological stance of Brahma Samaj which in principle was based on Western ideas but in practice could not get out of the Hindu tenets. Brahma Samaj, at least at the conceptual level, did want to break away from the religious clutches of Hinduism but ended up as a Hindu reform movement which also contributed to the 'nationalization' of upper caste Hindu culture. Phule makes it clear in no uncertain terms that all the reform movements were initiated by 'them' for serving 'their own' interests and is not able identify with them in any ways.

Locating Phule in Nationalist Historiography

There were strong voices within the Indian National Congress which tried to equate nationalism with that of Hindu nationalism. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lajpat Rai were the trio who gave the Hindu nationalist doctrine a definitive formulation. Tilak even explicitly stated that 'religion is an element of nationality' and reached the conclusion that

unity existed in India only when Hindu hegemony was secure. Interestingly the rubric term Hindu addressed only the upwardly mobile castes and completely forgot about the untouchables who have been suffering for ages under the Brahminical yoke. During this period when the political terrain was dominated by the 'greater Hindu' nationalists and the genteel anglophiles of the Indian National Congress, the vehicles of lower-caste socio-political assertion represented mainly by Phule in Maharashtra were still on the fringes. The anti-caste movement ignited by Phule was not acknowledged, let alone supported, by either of the two factions of dominant nationalist movement. In fact, attention was deviated, for all the wrong reasons, by focusing on Phule's pro-British stances. For a while, from 1887 till 1895 the annual sessions of Congress were held in conjunction with an Indian Social Reforms Congress. However by 1895 Tilak and his followers wrecked this convention and no one in the Congress bothered to revive it. Thus, in principle, social reforms were entirely removed from the Congress' agenda of action. (Muralidharan 17).

Sukumar Muralidharan, in his essay "Patriotism Without People: Milestones in the Evolution of Hindu Nationalist Ideology" bluntly records the reasons for Tilak neglecting Jotirao Phule's reform movements. "Phule spoke for the lower orders who were beyond the pale of the ritualistic Hindu hierarchy. He could not easily be accommodated within the discourse of Hindu nationalism which was then seeking to establish its influence, under the leadership of the upper castes" (Muralidharan 16). Though there were no direct, overt tension between Phule and Tilak one of Tilak's close political associates, Vishnu Shashtri, is said to have described Phule as the 'sorriest of scribblers with just the clothing of humanity on him'. (Muralidharan, 18-19). More than anything this was a typical response of the Brahmin orthodoxy towards Phule's reform movements. Though Tilak always reserved his comments on Phule, his biographer N.C.Kelkar reiterated that Vishnu Shastri's criticisms against Phule were certainly justifiable. This can leave one with the assumption that Tilak's sympathies were not found anywhere near the reform movements of Phule. Muralidharan points out that despite the differences, there has been an effort to assimilate Tilak and Phule into a common ideological stream. He says, "This is a characteristic tendency of the Congress brand of nationalism that seeks to fudge the ideological differences and social tensions that were manifest in the course of the freedom struggle. This is a pretence that is integral to the Congress' self-image as a single party that in microcosm, represents a single nation, in all its diversities and pluralities" (Muralidharan, 18). Whatever be the reason, the Tilak-Phule dichotomy was never discussed in national history, as it

posed the danger of exposing the paradoxes in the ‘national unity’ designed by the Congress and the nationalist movement.

Aloysius quotes M.S.A. Rao and tries to distinguish between the social reform movements launched by the upper castes and the transformative movements initiated by the lower castes. “... reform movements among the upper castes which were merely adjustive in nature, designed to strengthen the existing power relations, and the transformative movements among the lower castes which challenged the established social order, the value system and the patterns of superordination and subordination relationships ...”. (Aloysius 79). None of the upper caste reform movements including the celebrated Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj or Prarthana Samaj addressed the caste questions of oppression or the issues of inequality in any way. They only attempted to reform Hinduism or Brahminism without disturbing the fundamental principles of hierarchy. Aloysius tries to make a case for the anti-caste movements by arguing that they were also ‘national’ in the primary sense of the term as they addressed the common issues of egalitarianism, education and social mobility which were the concerns of every progressing nation. Phule, Sree Narayana Guru and Ambedkar emphasized the need for education. However the clarion calls of Ram Mohan Roys and Vidyasagars and Dayanand Saraswatis attained legitimacy as they were the voice of the dominant political voice – which had almost officially accepted caste Hindu nationalism as *the* nationalism. The nationalism which came from Mahars and Ezhavas were treated as casteist and parochial and hence did not qualify as ‘national’.

Phule’s points of departure from the colonial nationalist discourse

There were certain dominant threads which ran common through all the writings of Phule. Hence the paper had been trying to trace Phule’s nationalist discourse through his three major writings, it would be worthwhile to cull out the major points of departure which distinguished his anti-caste polemic.

1. Challenging the historical and religious base of Brahminical superiority
2. Rejection of Hindu religion and culture as the national
3. Exposing the non-secular base of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj

4. Opposing the nationalist tendency to homogenize and unite under the rubric of upper caste Hindu cultural symbols and traditional beliefs
5. Initiation of social reform movements without the patronage of the Congress or the other dominant reformers.

To make a quick conclusion, it would not be wrong to say that the above five factors were totally at loggerheads with the nationalist ideology which tried to homogenize 'India' at the cost of less dominant movements and discourses. The appropriation of Sathyashodhak Samaj, as just another social reform movement without its anti-caste tag, into the Congress fold in 1930 reiterates the skepticisms regarding the nationalist definitions and agenda.

Conclusion

Phule's anti-caste discourse highlights some nascent issues, which were diametrically in opposition to the nationalist discourse. The demand for the political representation of the lower castes, the rejection of Hindu reform movements, the challenging of the definition of the nation and the national and the questioning of established political figures could not tally with the nationalist thoughts of the time. It is difficult to read Phule's radical discourse within the framework of the nationalist discourse, which had been trying to maintain a linearity and harmony in terms of ideology and events. Anti-caste social reform movements were moving in a totally different direction and very often projected a pro-colonial approach. In a way, one can also say that, these movements have not been 'shut out' but they have been 'shut in'. That is, Phule's initiatives have been subsumed by the Congress so that the distinct identity does not jut out and disrupt the projected harmony.

A reading of the writings of Phule clearly shows his annoyance and distrust with the dominant mode of the nationalist movement. The critiques of the recent historians and socio-political thinkers substantiate this as well. It is, hence, a fact that there existed a disjunction between the national movement and the anti-caste movements during the colonial nationalist period. The articulations of caste in the form of Brahmanical reform movements did get the approval and encouragement from the nationalists but those articulations which challenged the social system were ignored.

In the context of the anti-caste movements a re-visiting of recorded history is imperative in finding their own trajectory which has been

overshadowed by many a dominant image. In Pandian's words, "It is by critiquing/rejecting the civilizational claims of modernity that the lower castes, at one level, could claim a space for their politics" (Pandian). This tracing of history from the sociological perspectives is important in the study of Dalit Literature as well. In *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, Sharankumar Limbale says, "Unlike classical literature, Dalit literature needs to be studied from a sociological perspective. ... And today, instead of teaching our youth classics, it is more important to teach them what a social movement is, what the social order is, and what our social problems are" (Limbale 147). This observation holds relevant for the modern India of twenty-first century, which still has a history fraught in mythology and contested pasts. However, these attempts to re-read through the missing links, gaps, blanks and silences the historiography cannot be limited within the academia. As Sarkar says, "... an exploration of the social conditions of production of history cannot afford to remain a merely intellectual project. It needs to become part of wider and far more difficult efforts to change these conditions" (Sarkar 46). An explorative study into critiques of the disjunction between the nationalist movement and anti-caste movements is also an effort to partake in 'the wider and far more difficult efforts' to make meaning out of the grey areas in social history which had been 'historiographically silenced'.

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DENIAL OF CENTRALITY OF VEDIC TEXTS: ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO A SUBALTERN UTOPIA

SHRADDHA KUMBHOJKAR

The Indians, like their counterparts elsewhere, have visualised a perfect society- a Utopia- since the most ancient period, in which the moral and the pragmatic are in complete harmony with each other. “Let everyone be happy, let everybody be free from ill health; let everyone prosper, let no one suffer from pain.” was the Utopian dream of mental, physical, material and spiritual harmony envisioned by the Upanishadic Indians some two and a half millennia ago. Despite the rigid structures of social organisation that strengthened the walls between the real and the ideal, and contrary to popular perception, attempts were always carried out towards bringing about harmony in the Indian society.¹ Prominent among these attempts were the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century B.C. as also the flourishing of Sufi sects and the widespread following of the Bhakti movement in pre-modern India.

Establishment of the British rule over India meant that the Indian culture was exposed to a dominant alternative. This was a traumatic experience for the Indians. An acute embarrassment about the inferiority of native ideas was deeply ingrained in the minds of the colonised people. The tendency is especially evident in the early writings of colonial India. *Lokahitawadi* (1823-1892), writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, lamented the “ignorance” of the natives in the following words,

“The people here are not worthy of touching upon any matter of consequence. They are ignorant about the whereabouts of the English. They haven't heard of the great development of knowledge achieved by the English... These people seem like fools in the new situation because, a

¹ I am deeply indebted to my Guru, late Prof. Aravind Deshpande for the theoretical insights about Utopia and counter-culture in particular, and philosophy of History in general.

great variety of kinds of knowledge has emerged in India as a consequence of the English rule. These (native) people have no idea whatsoever about it."²

Lokahitawadi pointed out that the Indian people failed to have a quest for knowledge, which was the reason, why the British who did possess such knowledge, succeeded in ruling over India. He asked, " Had these Bhats* undertaken a quest for real knowledge, wouldn't they have reached the English coast before the English reached here?"⁴

Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, another western educated intellectual of the first generation, described the English language in his picturesque style as the 'milk of a tigress'. He claimed,

"Progress, liberty and happiness will be consequential to the spread of the English knowledge. If the thunderbolt of English knowledge is in our hands, then we need not pay heed to the tyranny of the likes of Litton, Temple, Chatfield and Moore."⁵

The writings of Chiplunkar display a representative sense of awe in relation to the Western civilisation in general and knowledge in particular.

Realising the importance of knowledge, Indian youth embarked on a "Quest for knowledge". Large numbers of them started taking Western education offered by the newly established (1856 onwards) universities in the big cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, but some of them also took up the study of their own past and offered their own interpretations of it. Reinterpretation of the past was expected to serve a twofold purpose: to challenge the misrepresentation of Indian history and to free the Indian mind of the guilt for a supposedly worthless history and inculcate pride instead.

Lokmanya Tilak, in his editorial of *Kesari* on 7th May 1895 wrote,

"The descriptions of the disturbance of 1857 written by the capricious British authors were completely partial and exaggerating. They created an extremely unfavourable impression about the happenings in the mind of the reader.... The tendency of unjustified criticism of the leaders of 1857 adds insult to injury as far as their compatriots are concerned...If we are unable to set straight the false records of our recent history as created by the alien foreigners, how can we aim to know about our forefathers a

² A. K. Priyolkar, (ed.), *Lokahitawadikrita Nibandha Sangraha* (originally published in the Marathi weekly *Prabhaakar*), 1967, Bombay, P. 77.

* pejorative word for Brahmins

⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 247.

⁵ Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, *Nibandhamala*, Pune, 1917, P. 1225.

couple of thousand years ago? How can our knowledge and arts hope to have a new lease of life?"⁶

Thus, knowledge of the past was perceived to be necessary for rejuvenating the Indian mind. Administering the past with sympathy to the Indian masses was a part of the nationalists' efforts to nurse the injury inflicted by the biased Western projection of Indian history.

Anthony Smith has observed that invocation of the past is an essential and effective element of nationalist upsurge because the ideal images and exemplars of the distant past serve as 'prototypes and models for social and cultural innovation'.⁷ The writings of 19th Century Indian intellectuals display this tendency to invoke the past in search of models on which the future progress of the nation might be fashioned. Many a nationalist intellectual offered new interpretations of the literature of ancient India in order to exhibit the potential of the Indian culture in adapting itself to modern value system. Justice Ranade spelt out the reformers' stand thus,

"It would be a fatal objection if the argument for change were based on the ground that we must copy the foreign exemplar.... The change is sought not as an innovation, but as a return and restoration to the days of our past history. Those who advocate it justify it on the authority of texts revered, and admitted to be binding to this day. The intermediate corruption and degradation was not of the nation's seeking.... That (barbarous) force having ceased to be operative, we must now return to the old order of things, if we are to grow to our old proportions."⁸

One can trace the roots of this phenomenon to the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, when the colonial administrators such as William Jones, H. T. Colebrooke and John Wilson combined their official and academic interests and initiated scientific and modern scholarship in the field of Indology. The Vedas that had hitherto never been written down were translated and published by western scholars.⁹ It was noticed that

⁶ B. G. Tilak, Jhanshichi Rani, in *Daily Kesari*, 7th May 1895.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, London, 1983, P. X.

⁸ Ramabai Ranade (ed.) *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. G. Ranade*, 1914, P. 81.

⁹ Editions of the Rig-Veda were published by Max Muller, "Rig- Veda-Samhita with the Commentary of Sayancharya" (6 vols., London, 1849-74; 2nd ed., 4 vols., 1890-95); "The Hymns of the Rig-Veda in the Samhita and Pada Texts" (2nd ed., 2 vols., London, 1877); Aufrecht, "Samhita Text", in Roman characters (2nd ed., Bonn, 1877); selections in Lanman's "Sanskrit Reader" (Boston, 1884); Bothlingk, "Sanskrit-Chrestomathie" (3rd ed., Leipzig, 1897); Windisch, "Zwölf Hymnen des Rig-Veda", with Sayana's commentary (Leipzig, 1883). Translations were made

Sanskrit and a number of European languages had structural affiliations. This led to the development of the theory of a common Aryan past, which essentialised the East and the West as basically spiritual and scientific offshoots of a common race of people. Besides the linguistic similarities, the theory was based primarily on what later came to be recognised by Edward Said as 'Orientalisation of the Orient'. Max Mueller, for example, was a German scholar in Oxford who never set his foot on the Indian soil but described the Indians as gentle, passive and steeped in other-worldly thoughts, and lacking the sense of aggression and competition.¹⁰ Keshab Chunder Sen was one among the many prominent Indian intellectuals whose ideology was influenced by the theory of Aryan race and common origins of the Indian and Western European civilisations. He believed that British presence in India signified 'a reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race.'¹¹ As Romila Thapar has observed, 'depiction of Aryan society in glowing terms was soothing to the sensitivities of Indian scholarship.'¹² Sudhir Chandra has suggested¹³, the unacceptably painful reality of domination resulted in the search for a distant past that would have no connection with the oppressive present and would nurse the injury of subordination. Reinterpretations of ancient texts also provided a strong point against the universality of Western knowledge. Lokmanya Tilak explained in the introduction of his *Geeta Rahasya*,

"...It is not that the argument is proven better if it is supported by western corroborative thoughts. They are cited, however, for those who are dazed by the unprecedented growth of physical sciences, and who have learnt, as a result of their uni-directional system of education, to think of ethics in a superficial manner. They should be able to follow that... human knowledge has not yet overtaken the principles laid down by our ancient thinkers."¹⁴

into: English verse by Griffith (2 vols., Benares, 1896-97); selections in prose by Max Muller in "Sacred Books of the East", XXXII (Oxford, 1891); continued by Oldenburg, ibidem, XLVI (1897); German verse by Grassmann (2 vols., Leipzig, 1876-77); German prose by Ludwig (6 vols., Prague, 1876-88).

¹⁰ F. Max. Mueller, *India, What Can It Teach Us?* London, 1883, P. 101 ff.

¹¹ Keshab Chunder Sen, *Lectures in India*, Calcutta, 1923, P. 323.

¹² Romila Thapar, Interpreting early India, in *History and Beyond*, New Delhi, 2000, P. 8.

¹³ Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, New Delhi, 1991, P. 152.

¹⁴ B. G. Tilak, *Geeta Rahasya*, Mumbai, 1923, P. 265.

Interpretation of the ancient texts by the nationalists was an attempt to establish the superiority of Indian culture as against the Western one.

It might not be out of place to look into the reasons why ancient Indian Texts were chosen by Indian nationalists of the nineteenth century for creative reinterpretation. Firstly, since the social composition of the audience was predominantly Hindu, Hindu texts were more likely to be identified with by the masses. Secondly, most of the Hindus sincerely believed that their lives were regulated by these texts. Third reason why the ancient texts were preferred for reinterpretation is that the ancient texts with the lapse of about three thousand years between them and the present, had become quite distant in the collective memory of the Indian masses for whom the reinterpretations were intended. Fourthly, the archaic character of the Sanskrit language rendered a plurality of interpretations possible which would meet the requirements of the modern intellectuals. Fifthly, according to the Indian tradition, age gives respectability. This gave the Sanskrit texts a certain sanctity and respectability that texts in no other Indian language could enjoy. Hence, the intellectuals tried to associate the modern ideals that they wished to propagate, with the ancient texts, thus trying to win respectability for the modern ideals. Lastly, in their attempts to reconcile tradition with modernity, the Indian intellectuals wanted to retain the essence of tradition and combine it with modern values.

As for the modern values, there could be little argument as to which values were acceptable or otherwise. The problem rose about what tradition really meant. Since the Indian society was multicultural and plural in nature, there were numerous ways of life that existed simultaneously in tandem. People belonging to various religions, castes, sub-castes, regions and economic classes had entirely different ways of life. If one had to choose a common tradition for reconciliation with modernity, the choice was rather complicated. The major differences of opinion in the nationalist discourse were based on this plurality of tradition.

Vedas, the most ancient Sanskrit texts enjoyed a centrality in the reinterpretations offered by the nationalists in their efforts towards legitimising modernity with the help of tradition. The intellectuals belonging to the high castes and inclined towards a pro-tradition stand reinterpreted the Vedic texts in such a way as to prove that the Indian tradition was capable of adapting itself to modernity.

It is a fortunate thing that most of the social evils complained of in these days, were unknown in the days of our highest glory, and in seeking their

reform, we are not imitating any foreign models, but restoring its ancient freedom and dignity in place of subsequent corruptions.¹⁵

Ranade emphasised that change in the unacceptable social conditions as sought by the social reformers could be substantiated if the reformers managed to trace its roots to the ancient texts.

"...in dealing with the masses, it would not do to follow any other method than that of taking the old texts, and putting new interpretation on them, so as to make all feel that there was an effort made to preserve the old continuity, and there was no attempt at innovation, which in the eyes of the ignorant, always meant revolution."¹⁶

On the other hand, intellectuals of a more reformist inclination would try to demystify them. Shankar Pandurang Pandit was one of the reformers who tried to point out the fallacy of the sacrosanct nature attributed to the Vedas. He noted,

"The Vedic hymns are not composed by sages that were always engaged in penance, and lived in mountain caves, but by poets who were householders, had children and always fought with their enemies riding on horsebacks. We term these poets as Sages and indulge in unprecedented and unfounded imaginations about them. If one of these poets was to resurrect and come in this world, he will be wonderstruck by our prejudices about him."¹⁷

Pandit thus demystified the Vedas in an effort to point out the fact that the Indian tradition is not inviolate, because there is nothing sacrosanct about it. Furthermore, he pointed out, some aspects of the tradition, that need to be modified in order to reconcile the Indian tradition with modernity, may be freely modified without apprehensions.

However, by either hailing the Vedic way of life as the Golden Age of Indian Civilisation, or by demystifying the Vedas to argue for the flexibility of the Indian culture, Indian intellectuals invariably attributed centrality to the Vedic texts. It was Jotirao Phule, a thinker activist of the late nineteenth century, who showed the courage to deny the Vedic Texts this centrality. As a result, his ideas provide a real alternative to the hegemonising discourse of the modern West as well as that of high caste

¹⁵M. G. Ranade, *Op. Cit.*, Pp. 89-90.

¹⁶*Ibid*, Pp. 111-2.

¹⁷ Shankar Pandurang Pandit, *Vedarthayatna or an Attempt to Interpret the Vedas*, Mumbai, 1876. P. 33.

Hinduism, offering the masses a freedom from political and cultural subordination and an alternative route to a Subaltern Utopia.

Jotirao Phule was born in the Mali caste of gardeners considered lowly by the contemporary Hindu society and experienced the resultant social injustices. Exposed to missionary education and influenced by Thomas Paine's writings, Phule was convinced of the inherent equality of all men. He was acutely aware of the dual subordination faced by many of his countrymen, viz. colonial as well as high-caste domination. He realised that the British colonial rule was at least in principle, based on reason. On the other hand, the caste hierarchy in the Indian society defied all reason. Hence, he chose to fight the stronger enemy first and created an entire ideological and practical counter-culture to fight the social inequality and injustices.¹⁸

Phule posed a question as to the legitimacy of the upper caste people trying to represent the entire Indian nation in an essentialised way while there were vast differences in the lifestyle and attitude of the upper and lower castes. He questioned the credentials of the elite intellectuals to present a monolithic picture of India's past without empathising with the agonies of the lower castes. He pointedly asked them, "Have you or your wives and children had the misfortune to do manual labour on a hungry stomach? Has any of the Brahmins carried night-soil on his shoulders?"¹⁹

Partha Chatterjee has observed that India possessed indigenous cultural resources by which it could maintain its independent spiritual identity.²⁰ Phule seemed to have realised this point. He tried to relate his ideal Indian identity to the pre-Aryan period when the non-Aryans occupied the Indian cultural landscape. The Utopia that he envisaged had its roots in an alternative tradition, which may be said to represent the "Little Tradition" unlike the mainstream intellectuals who traced the roots of their visions of an ideal Indian society to the Sanskrit "Great Tradition" if we may borrow these concepts from Robert Redfield.

Phule denied the precedence of the Vedic culture and asserted the existence of an indigenous culture of the "original inhabitants".

"Recent researches have shown beyond a shadow of doubt that Brahmins were not the aborigines of India.... The aborigines whom the Aryans

¹⁸ Aravind Deshpande, , Paryayi Sanskritiche Janak, in Hari Narake, (ed.), Mahatma Phule: Shodhachya Navya Vata, Mumbai, 1998 Passim.

¹⁹ Y.D. Phadake (ed.), *Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmay*, 1991, P. 386.

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1994, Pp. 4-6.

subjugated, or displaced, appear to have been a hardy and brave people from the determined front which they offered to these interlopers."²¹

The interpretations of ancient Indian texts offered by Phule depicted the cultural traditions of the past in a modernistic light. Modern day motives of social welfare, democratic values and gender equality were projected to have existed in the ancient texts. Phule declared that the mythical sovereign of the downtrodden people, the *Mahasubha*, was "Extremely just and kind" and really cared for the 'welfare of the people'.²²

In his ballad on the life of the medieval king Shivaji, Phule described a story within a story where the young Shivaji was hearing historical stories from his mother. Here, Jijabai narrates that Shivaji's forefathers, the original inhabitants of the land who were called Kshatriyas were vanquished by the outsiders under the leadership of Brahma. The Brahmins cowed the original inhabitants down and hence 'It hurts me like an arrow in my heart to let you know today that you are looked down upon as Shudras'.²³ The past, thus administered, was expected to make people think about their present condition and act against the injustice to bring about a change in their present day identity.

Phule decried manipulation of history as done by the British historians who based their texts on the versions of history supplied by the Brahmin orthodoxy. In a letter to Mama Paramanand, a contemporary reformer, he pointed out the contemporary tendency of the Brahmanical poets 'to create new ballads and introduce them to the public as true historical accounts. Such artificial ballads have no place in my collection.'²⁴

Phule challenged the misrepresentation of the condition of the lower castes in the past and the contemporary times. The significance of Phule's writings lies in the fact that he was one of the earliest thinkers to have exposed that the Indian tradition was not monolithic and there were voices of dissent from within the Indian tradition as well. He offered interpretations of the ancient Indian culture in an attempt to demythicise it. He challenged the claimed universality of the Vedas and questioned, "If God intended the Vedas for emancipating the entire human race, why are they composed only in the Sanskrit language and not in numerous others which humans use?"²⁵ He pointed out the inadequacy of the Brahmanical

²¹ Y.D. Phadake, *Op. Cit.*, Pp. 117-118.

²² *Ibid.*, Pp. 235.

²³ *Ibid.*, P. 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 406.

²⁵ *Ibid.* P.485.

culture in encompassing the entire Indian society and thus highlighted its parochial nature.

What he meant by the entire Indian society was explained by him in a pamphlet *Ishaara*, meaning warning. He established the identity of the Indian people by defining the word 'subjects' to mean 'Shudras and Atishudras' that is the lowest castes.²⁶ He made clear that this was an identity of suffering and quoted the saying "Only the one who is wounded is capable of understanding the pain, another is incapable of understanding it."²⁷

He widened the horizons of this identity of suffering by encompassing various classes of oppressed people in it such as women, slaves, African Americans, etc. In fact, he dedicated his monograph "*Gulamgiri*" published in 1873 to "The good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their ... devotion in the cause of Negro slavery...." He offered etymologies of various names of lower castes in an attempt to establish a common origin for them. He traced the origins of the *Dashnami* castes to the word *Dasyu*; *Mahars* to *Maha- Ari* (Great foe); Shudras from *Kshudra* (insignificant). He also mentioned that "solid proofs of the cruelties committed by these heartless Arya Brahmins can be found in the writings of great men from Britain, France and America."²⁸ He cited the Vedic verse, "*Twachaam Krishnam Arandhavat*" which described that the Vedic people "*scraped off the dark skin*" of the original inhabitants of India.²⁹ He explained that the ancient texts, which were supposed to regulate the life of the Indian people, were in reality, the product of the crafty and selfish cunning of the Brahmanical tradition that depicted the "greatness of Aryans and slavery of the Shudras."³⁰ He indicated the authorities that exposed the true nature of the cunning of the Brahmins in his *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak*. Colonel Legrand Jacob and Sir William Jones were praised by him for exploding the insidious craft of the Brahmins in deceiving the Shudras in the name of Vedas. He noted that 'it was thanks to the efforts of these English savants that the craft of the Brahmins is exposed to the Shudras.'³¹ The efforts taken by Phule to give proof to his argument in a modern and scientific manner indicate that he

²⁶ *Ibid.* P. 387.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* P. 485.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Pp. 484-5

³⁰ *Ibid.* P. 538.

³¹ *Ibid.* P. 491.

wanted to spare no method for drawing attention of his readers to the unequal foundations of the Indian society.

Phule questioned the unequal and unfavourable distribution of power in the Indian society. In his *Akhanda* poetry he questioned the servile identity of the Shudras and urged them to rid themselves of the Brahmanical dominance.

"God has given equally to the Shudras what he has given to the Aryas without exception. Then why are the Aryas the masters and Shudras the slaves? This is the right time to search for the truth. Grace of God it was, that Brahmins were discarded and the English introduced. Do not hesitate anymore, Joti says, down with the cunning Brahmins."³²

He was grateful to the British rulers because, according to him, "It was during the rule of the kind English government that the Shudras have attained the status of humans."³³

It must be noted here, that Phule was among those intellectuals who considered the colonial intervention as a part of the Divine Plan. He was, however, not blind to the potential oppression by the British rulers. In this regard, his stand was clear. In his play *Tritiya Ratna*, Phule declared that if the British rulers might, in future, oppress the subjects of this nation, the Shudras, who will be educated by that time, will establish their own kingdom like the one established once by the Great Shivaji. They will look after their own governance, but 'never ever shall the cunning rule of the Bhat Brahmins return on this nation.'³⁴ Thus, conscious of the oppressive potential of the British rule, he was determined in his choice of the lesser evil.

The reason for his choice was quite simple. He knew that the British government was based on a 'Rule of Law' while the Indian culture was a hierarchy based only on birth. He juxtaposed the Brahmanical and Aryan canons with the modern concept of justice and warned sarcastically, "Modern law is not applicable here! Vedas written on parchment by the crafty Brahmins are just enough."³⁵

He questioned the validity of fundamental concepts of the Brahmanical culture such as sin and virtue and their applicability in life. He argued against the first Marathi interpretation of the *Bhagawat Geeta*, *Jnyaneshwari*. The *Jnyaneshwari* explains the ideal person as the one who

³² *Ibid.* P. 557.

³³ *Ibid.*, P. 497.

³⁴ *Ibid.* P. 30

³⁵ *Ibid.* P. 489.

attains unity with the 'Ultimate Reality', the *Brahman*. Phule argued that if there is no difference between one's self and the others, what is the point of devotion for any one god? If the ideal person remains immutable in all conditions, then why should one discriminate between sin and virtue?³⁶ This was not just a rhetorical refutation of everything that was related to Brahmins. Phule was making conscious attempts at attacking the fundamentals of the Brahmanical discourse. All these attempts of Phule, to negate the superiority of the Brahmanical culture were a part of his effort to create a counter-culture that could sustain the Indian identity that he envisaged.

It may be noted here that contrary to popular belief, this identity was not incompatible with the idea of Indian nationalism. Phule intended to widen the base and scope of the concept of nation as against the attempts at restricting its scope to the high culture of Brahmanism by the upper castes. His ideas about the formation of the Indian nation were not ambiguous. He wrote,

"... unless the Shudras, Atishudras, Bhils, Kolis and all the people of this land of Bali become learned and capable of thinking, there can be no 'unity of the people', no 'nation'. This being so, what is the worth of the National Congress that has been founded only by the Brahmins?"³⁷

Contemporary authors such as Chiplunkar bitterly criticised Phule's writings.³⁸ These writings however, as observed by G. T. Madkholkar, were a result of the "inability to comprehend the nature and significance of Phule's activities with regard to reformation of religion and society."³⁹ Contrary to the bitter and unfair criticism directed against his writings, Phule's ideology was not anti-national. In fact, his concept of 'nation' was more comprehensive than that of the contemporary caste elite that entertained a parochial concept of nation.

The necessity to chalk out an all-encompassing Indian identity and the need to widen the base of the concept of 'nation' is what motivated Phule, like other nationalist intellectuals to search for a past that the masses could identify themselves with and which could be of therapeutic use for getting rid of the doubly 'oppressive present'. Phule, like other contemporary intellectuals, endeavoured to use the past as an exemplar for envisioning an ideal future, a Utopia.

³⁶ *Ibid.* P. 475.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 495.

³⁸ Nirmalkumar Phadkule, *Nibandhamaletil Teen Nibandha*, Pune, 1975, P. 25.

³⁹ Cited in *Ibid.*, Pp. 35-36

The Utopia that Phule wished to create had to be based on a different footing as against the one envisaged by the upper caste intellectuals. Phule commemorated the myths and legends from the folk traditions such as that of Bali⁴⁰. It was not an accident, that Phule, who had read the writings of Thomas Paine and believed in rationality, gave sanctity of reality to the myths of the 'little tradition'. Aravind Deshpande has pointed out that Phule was conscious of the peculiar status of History in India. History for the Indians is not just a text but also a faith. His use of the myth of Bali was the logical outcome of his ideological consistency wherein he accepted both, Bali as well as Vamana as historical figures. It must be noted that his writings were not meant to make gentle requests to the authorities, but their purpose was to shock the readers into realisation of the nature of their oppression. This purpose was successfully achieved by Phule's writings.

Phule stands unparalleled in the social reform movement for the fact that he not only supported the emancipation of women but also put it into practice. Another characteristic feature of his writings is that he tried to relate the issue of gender with that of caste and class. The result was that his writings provide us with a wider picture of contemporary reality. He is also one of the few social reformers who publicly acknowledged the sexual deprivation of women as a part of their suppression.⁴¹

To give a brief idea of Phule's activities, it may be mentioned here that he was the first non-missionary in India to have started a school for Girls. He was the pioneer of education of untouchable children in India. He himself educated his wife Savitribai so that she worked independently as the Headmistress of the Girls' School. In order to prevent infanticide of illegitimate babies, he started a rescue home for unwed mothers and pregnant widows. To eradicate the practice of untouchability, he made his private water tank available for the untouchables. To do away with the

⁴⁰ The little tradition in many parts of India celebrates the Myth of Bali. Bali was a just ruler of the Earth, who was so virtuous that his virtuosity posed a threat to the supreme position of the God Vishnu. Vishnu therefore, took the Avatar/ form of a dwarf Brahmin -Vamana asking for alms. Bali promised to donate three footholds of land to this Vamana. Vamana, after getting the promise, changed his form and attained extraordinary proportions to occupy the entire earth in the first foothold, the sky in the second foothold and for the third foothold, Bali offered him his head. Vamana thus stamped Bali down and sent him off into the dungeons. Women celebrate a day to commemorate the kingdom of Bali and make a wish for the return of this just king to the earth.

⁴¹ Y. D. Phadake, *Op. Cit.*, P. 376

Brahmanical dominance of the low castes, he founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj – the Society of Seekers of Truth.

Phule drafted a completely novel Text- Saarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak- for the rituals of the followers of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. While charting out the rationality-based rituals from birth till burial of the Samajists, Phule left no space for discrimination. Gender, caste, economic status, occupation- no category was left open for discrimination by Phule in his Utopian vision of a 'just' society.

The birth of a child was to be celebrated by rejoicing and promises to provide the child with good education. The marriage ceremony was to be celebrated between adult husband and wife, without dowry, and by exchange of vows to take care of each other as equal partners. No Brahmin was required to conduct the marriage or any other ritual. The deities, besides the supreme Satya -Truth - that were invoked to bless the married couple were not the ones worshipped by high caste Brahmanical religion, but the local deities worshipped according to the folk tradition. When a Samajist died, he was to be given a burial according to the low caste customs instead of a cremation as followed by the higher castes. Prayers were to be said at the burial that hoped for the union of the departed with the ultimate Truth. Phule offered an alternative way of life for those who were disillusioned with high caste Brahmanism. As a result, his ideas provided a real alternative to the hegemonising discourse of the modern West as well as that of high caste Hinduism, offering the masses a freedom from political and cultural subordination and an alternative route to a Subaltern Utopia.